



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**Economic Commission for Africa**

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

**Opening Remarks**

**on**

**African Development Forum 2000**  
**AIDS: The Greatest Leadership Challenge**

***by***

**K. Y. Amoako**  
**Executive Secretary of ECA**

**Addis Ababa**  
**3 December 2000**

His Excellency, Dr. Negasso Gidada, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

His Excellency, Mr. Justin Malewezi, Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi,

His Excellency, Mr. Nagoum Yamassoum, Prime Minister of the Republic of Chad,

His Excellency, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Those living with HIV/AIDS with whom we meet in personal and societal solidarity,

Respected experts from all over the world,

Leaders of civil society, women's organization, youth leaders, business and labour,

Religious leaders, elders and custodians of our African traditions,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the year 2000 African Development Forum.

I am delighted that His Excellency, Dr. Negasso Gidada will formally open this Forum. His personal commitment and official leadership on HIV/AIDS here in Ethiopia is inspiring.

We in the Economic Commission for Africa are grateful to each and every one of you for coming here to Addis for this Forum. We are grateful to the leadership of the United Nations family, for their tremendous dedication and commitment to the African Development Forum.

I am therefore delighted to acknowledge the presence, in this room, of Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of UNDP and Mr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

And we are especially grateful to all the work so many thousands of people have done at local, national, and regional levels to make this Forum possible.

Friends, how should I speak to you, particularly those of you who live with this disease? We are here for ideas and actions and political progress. But first I have to speak to you just as one African to another.

I was a boy when my country, Ghana, achieved independence. I was raised on optimism and the certainty that Africans were destined for a good life. Never, in my wildest dreams, did I imagine that microscopic bugs could push my whole continent to the edge of the abyss.

You see these orphanages, you see the villages of graves, you read these reports, you meet with people all over Africa whose lives and futures have been turned upside down.

And you just have to stop whatever you are doing and reassess. And this is what I have come to believe:

This is not our inevitable future.

This is a battle for our continent's survival. We carry inside each and every one of us the potential to increase the problem or the potential to help solve the problem.

This is not a policy issue: this is ourselves, our families, our communities, our hopes.

And this is our decisive moment.

We are in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of our pandemic. Calls to arms have rung out with increasing frequency.

The global community met on our continent, in Durban, to define the global problem of HIV/AIDS and to give guidelines for handling the problem.

National actions have been taken in some countries.

But, the pandemic rolls on in most countries on this continent. This cannot continue. Africa must define its own response to this pandemic, and it must respond up to the scale of the challenge.

This is our decisive moment.

In the past, as the pandemic started out, usually one heard the comforting view that few were perishing from AIDS compared with so many other diseases. Who can say this anymore, when it is our largest killer?

In the past, it was possible to say that the disease was found only in a few countries on our continent. Who can say this anymore, when it is in every country in Africa?

In the past, it was possible to say that it was hard to measure the proportion of adults in Africa with HIV/AIDS. Now, with 8.8% of our adult population infected, Who can say this anymore?

In the past, it was possible to say that the damage to communities, to economies at large, and, indeed to our whole economic progress could not be measured. But with a current annual reduction of .7% of our GDP per year, and soon a projected reduction of 2% of our GDP per year, who can say this anymore?

In the past, it was possible to say that it was hard to know what do to in order to cut back and reverse the pace of this disease. But with examples of pushing back the spread of HIV/AIDS ranging from Senegal to Uganda, Who can say this anymore?

This is our decisive moment.

And so we are here.

We are here at the second annual African Development Forum, a forum dedicated not to talk, but to mobilising action. In 1999, we commenced these Forums on topics of concern to all of Africa, with the topic of information and communications technology for development. Out of that Forum, came several concrete public and private sector initiatives, a whole series of policy understandings, and an upcoming summit of heads of state and government, to bring home those information technology strategies with the capability of transforming our societies.

On the day in 1999 when the first Forum ended, ECA, and our valued colleagues in UNAIDS, held the first planning meeting for this Forum. From the start, we took seriously the words of Nelson Mandela, and so many other

leaders of politics and conscience, that it is time to move from rhetoric to action.

We have carefully collected the experiences, the data and the ideas remarkably captured in a number of perceptive background papers, consultations throughout this continent, and meetings with focus groups. I want to thank a splendid technical advisory committee, and so many other experts, for their help in the preparations. All along the way, and at every level on our continent, we have been encouraged to hold this Forum.

Leadership is our topic. Leadership at all levels: within the family, the community, the towns, the provinces, civil society, the churches and mosques, the elder's meeting places, business, labour and, uppermost, at the national political level. Leadership which is the boldest, most persistent, most insightful, compassionate, forceful, cooperative and imaginative we have ever had.

Leadership to move into the open, to be in solidarity with those who carry HIV/AIDS, who face the most dramatic possible challenges, who have value to us, just as we must have value to them.

Leadership to do not just what is right in education, in health care, in economic support, but to do what is right on the proper scale.

- Leadership to shun, fight and jail those who beat up and rape girls and women,
- Leadership to insist that schools and teachers, and communities, teach sex education to all children before the actual age of sexual activity;
- Leadership and courage to be human and compassionate;

- Leadership to do the very best we can to improve health systems, especially for mothers and children;
- Leadership to assure that those with AIDS can work as long as they are able;
- Leadership to make absolutely sure that AIDS orphans will not be lost to this world, but will be given decent and fully supportive chances.

Now: think of all these. Each and every one of the leadership acts necessary to prevent HIV/AIDS and to help those burdened with HIV/AIDS, each of these leadership acts, without exception, are things we want anyway for a stronger, better developed Africa.

Do we want to assure that African women are empowered to control their own lives and destinies only because we know this will help reduce HIV/AIDS, or because it is right, just, moral and part of the foundation of a society which can advance?

Do we want to start working with the millions of dedicated youth on this continent? Millions seeking to be part of the answers to our poverty... only because this will help control the HIV/AIDS pandemic, or because we have so much lost time to make up, in partnering with our youth for a better common future?

Leadership on HIV/AIDS calls for so many of the fundamental things we should have been doing anyway. An Africa where all our leaders, at every level, where each of us here today works for the policies, practices and programs to reduce HIV/AIDS, is, in fact, the Africa we should all be working for anyway.

But we must go beyond even this, for we are in a war for survival, where we need to ratchet up all our work to battle HIV/AIDS.

Leadership is on test now. Leadership of a special kind.

There are those who honestly manage the day-to-day tasks of their institutions and governments. These are adequate leaders.

Other leaders do more. They spend time inspiring people to be better than they otherwise would, and to act not only for their own selfish ends but for the benefit of all. These are good leaders.

Then there are leaders who rise to face unusual threats to their people. They search for answers and successes, and when they find them, they scale up the response to the maximum.

They surpass even themselves, mustering the energies of the whole people. They crusade for change and reform. And they lead by personal example as well as by exhortation. They are selfless. They are dedicated. And they do everything they can to bring success to their people. They are the great leaders. They are the leaders who will be remembered.

To all leaders at every level in Africa, I say, this is our decisive time. We now face our threat: the survival of our people. It is our decisive time for greatness.

I have been urged by many to lay into our friends from richer countries around the world. To say that 2.4 million HIV/AIDS deaths a year in Africa, and a total now of 12.1 million orphans, is the footprint of genocide.

Some want me to stress that the international response is about a tenth of what it should be to adequately cope with HIV/AIDS. The annual financial

gap is now \$3 billion and is forecast to grow to \$10 billion by 2005. But I am not going to stress this point.

What I am going to stress is that IF we show the desperately needed leadership at all levels.... Here...., First... we have the sequence right.

No one is going to save us from this crisis but ourselves. But we also have a right to expect international solidarity, when we are taking proper ownership and leadership of this disease.

So, where should this Forum leave us?

In my view, this is the start of a major process.

- There will be immediate pay-offs, as new strategies and successes are presented,
- There will be the mobilisation over, what I encourage to be, a stirring, forthright and soon-to-be famous African Consensus on HIV/AIDS, which will emerge from this Forum,
- There will be follow-up with Heads of State and Government,
- and, we must all meet the Leadership Challenge by Scaling up the national and International Partnership against AIDS in Africa.

We must resolve that this Forum will shake the remaining complacency and ignorance about HIV/AIDS.

One Northern NGO, working on a range of development projects throughout Africa, has just announced that 80% of its program next year will be on HIV/AIDS. I look for even more dramatic and important commitments

against HIV/AIDS to emerge from this Forum, as we here in Africa finally stop this pandemic in its tracks.

So, I end with three Challenges:

First, do not attend this Forum as if you were attending any kind of routine meeting. Attend, to find out the things which will enable you to be a better leader in the fight to stop the spread of new HIV/AIDS. Attend to learn how each of us can help assure a decent and a caring life, for those burdened with HIV/AIDS and their families.

Second, all of us must think hard about how to scale up the best strategies, policies and programs among us. This must not be theory, but real action.

And Third, The Consensus coming from this Forum will be taken up by a Heads of State Summit, being organized by President Obasanjo with the full backing and collaboration of our brother His Excellency Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of the OAU. The Summit will take place in four months.

But, do not wait for us. Think about holding your own consultations when you return home. Invite media, civil society, business, labour, youth groups, women's groups. In fact, look around at the kind of people you see at this Forum, and remember the people at home who will help you replicate a Forum to take your own actions to the next levels of effectiveness and impact.

This is the time to be decisive, This is our test. And because we are on the front lines, This is the world's test.

Thank you.