



**UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

**“ENGAGING WITH FRAGILE STATES:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES”**

**Welcoming Address**

**by**

**Abdoulie Janneh  
UN Under-Secretary-General and  
Executive Secretary of ECA**

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Mr. Facilitator,  
Mr. Bernard Zoba, AU Commissioner for Infrastructure  
Honorable Ministers,  
Mr. Poul Engberg-Pedersen, Director-General, the Norwegian Agency for  
Development Cooperation,  
Mr. Vinod Thomas, Director-General Independent Evaluation Group of the World  
Bank,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to be here with you this morning and to welcome you to Addis Ababa, headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

We are quite honoured to be playing host to such a distinguished gathering including the Ministers who have made time to participate at this meeting. This shows the importance that we all attach to the theme of this conference – *Engaging with Fragile States: Challenges and Opportunities*. We are also happy to welcome our partners in organizing this meeting particularly Mr. Vinod Thomas, Director-General, Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank who has centred the needs of fragile states by making them the focus of this meeting. We also thank Mr. Poul Engberg-Pedersen, Director-General of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, who has remained engaged and active in supporting the governance agenda in Africa.

The collaboration between the World Bank, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and ECA in organizing this conference and indeed, the presence of all of us here today is a clear testimony of the importance we all attach to partnerships in forging good governance and peace and security in Africa. This occasion also affords us an opportunity to address the human, economic and social implications of fragile states especially in achieving regional priorities like NEPAD and on national, regional and global security.

State fragility, which is indicated when governments are incapable of delivering basic social services, protecting people from internal and external threats, and providing institutions that respond to the legitimate demands and needs of the population can have dire implications for affected societies. Its effect may reach beyond national boundaries and can lead to devastating humanitarian crises and untold human miseries. In most cases, it is brought about by problems relating to governance as well as economic, political and social crisis and this was certainly the case in a few African countries in the last decade.

Today, it is widely acknowledged that despite some understandable bumps along the way, most African countries continue to make steady progress with regard to improving governance structures and promoting peace and security. The

improved trend in governance is evident from increased political accountability, decentralization of decision-making processes and greater involvement of citizens in the development process. It is also visible from improved macroeconomic performance in the continent which in turn has brought about more stable economic conditions and is, in many cases, translating to higher growth rates. It should be acknowledged nevertheless that despite the visible progress that has been made, there remains a lot to be done, especially as some African countries continue to face challenges of fragility due in some cases to on-going conflicts and in others to their post-conflict situations.

It therefore remains important to pay particular attention to the challenges facing fragile states. At the same time, there are also several emerging initiatives to support fragile states and it is therefore gratifying that this conference also focuses on this aspect. It is essential that we assist fragile states to take advantage of available opportunities, as they need all the support they can get to become capable states.

International engagement in support of fragile states will need to focus on issues such as democratic governance, human rights, civil society engagement and peace-building, and strengthening the capability of states to fulfill their core functions. Some of the priority functions include: ensuring security and justice; mobilizing revenue; establishing an enabling environment for basic service delivery, strong economic performance and employment generation. Support to these areas in a concerted and sustained manner, will tremendously assist in transforming fragile states into capable states.

A number of things should guide our collective approach to supporting fragile states. For instance, the promotion of good governance lies at the heart of ensuring peace and stability in Africa because it gives voice to previously marginalized communities and helps to ensure a fair and equitable access to resources and opportunities for development. This in turn helps to build legitimacy and confidence in the workings of the state which minimizes the potential for conflict. Post-conflict reconstruction and development are equally important in building capable states and are essential for preventing affected countries from sliding back into conflict. In addition, they provide a firm basis for meeting international commitments to eradicate poverty and achieve the MDGs in Africa.

Similarly, affected states must take ownership of the policy process and commit themselves to addressing the fundamental issues that brought about crisis and conflict in the first place. It is also necessary to rebuild capacity in fragile states and to provide resources for resuming development activity. Effective partnerships are needed in order to provide the required resources for giving meaningful support to post-conflict countries. In doing so, however, we should avoid the approach of preparing a standard menu of international assistance for

fragile states. Although many of the characteristics of fragile states are similar, the causes may be context specific and thus approaches to addressing the challenges and opportunities must be context specific as well.

The regional perspective is another area that deserves our attention as we address the challenges and opportunities facing fragile states. While conflict in individual countries has particular characteristics, there is also the cross-border and sub-regional dimension which brings about important commonalities that need to be addressed. ECA is therefore working closely with the Mano River Union to support the recovery and reconstruction efforts of its member countries, namely Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

I take this opportunity to salute the World Bank and its partners for its pioneering initiative to assist the "Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS)". I feel that the LICUS approach is in the right direction because of its overall intention of improving development aid effectiveness in fragile states and helping to think of new ways of conceptualizing, delivering and evaluating the impact of the assistance they receive. The African Development Bank has also taken special measures to address this issue and I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge their efforts.

On its part, the United Nations has added an important new dimension to its work with the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission which is to promote and accelerate international efforts to support post-conflict states. ECA's own work will continue to support and promote the governance agenda in Africa including through strengthening capacities for public administration and providing tangible assistance to the African Peer Review Mechanism process, which is an integral part of on going efforts to strengthen governance in this continent. It complements the new peace and security architecture of the African Union which is aimed at reducing conflicts the continent. In the long run, both these processes will also help to reduce the causes of conflict and contribute to building capable states.

While all these efforts must be welcomed as a positive sign of the increased priority being given to meet the challenges facing fragile states, it is important to harmonize interventions and ensure coherence for effective delivery of assistance. This gathering which embodies our collective aspiration for partnership to support fragile states should pay particular attention to this and other related aspects of effective cooperation in delivery. I am confident that you will come up with concrete and meaningful recommendations that will help the states concerned to meet the challenges and utilize the opportunities that are now available to them.

I wish you fruitful deliberations. Thank you for your kind attention.