

**OPENING ADDRESS BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO  
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF  
THE NEPAD MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE,  
JOHANNESBURG, OCTOBER 22-23, 2004**

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**PROTOCOL**

It is with great delight that I address you all today at this opening session of the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on NEPAD. I welcome you all to this opportunity to examine whence we have come, where we are, and where we are heading. It is also a good opportunity to examine our achievements and the challenges for the future. I want to thank the Government and people of South Africa for the traditional African hospitality shown to all of us and hope that we shall all leave here at the end of this dialogue with renewed energy to work even harder for our peoples and continent.

In large measure, the world in which we live and operate has not changed much. NEPAD in itself was a response to the inequalities that pervades the global divisions of labour, power and opportunities. With slight improvements here and there, the content and context of global political and economic engagements and arrangements remain essentially the same. The good news is that we know our problems; we know the challenges that we face; we have generated the confidence and energy to deal with our problems; and we have designed holistic and realistic responses to make life better for our countries and peoples.

We must not shy away from the fact that underdevelopment and dependence remain at the core of our problems. Most of our people still lack basic human needs. Unemployment and underemployment remain high. Terms of trade have not improved in any significant way, direct investments are down or stagnant in many countries, and the debt overhang continues to task our meager resources. But things are generally looking up. It is now left for us to resolve the festering crises in the continent, promote growth and development, consolidate our democracies, and unleash the boundless

energies of our people in our quest for self-reliance, industrialization, peace, security, infrastructural development, sustainable growth and development.

Politically, while things are looking brighter and better, some lingering problems remain. Conflicts and wars remain and our political parties and institutions are yet to be consolidated. However, we must commend ourselves at being able to remain steadfast in our opposition to the illegal or extra-legal seizure of power. This has gone a long way to help improve the credibility of our policies and programmes in the global community and give the much-needed political confidence to our peoples. In line with the overall objectives of NEPAD, we must continue to work on opening up and democratizing political spaces, promoting human rights and gender equality, strengthening democratic institutions, cultivating and nurturing democratic practices, and addressing those issues that encourage alienation, the arrogance of power, despotism, intolerance, and violence.

I must also mention that the laudable goals of NEPAD will not succeed if we do not courageously and comprehensively address the issue of corruption, mismanagement, waste, and misplaced priorities in our societies. Corruption has been the bane of development and stability in Africa and unless we adopt all possible strategies to enhance transparency, accountability, due process and fair competition, our effort in other sectors of our political economies will be subverted by festering corruption.

It was in the quest for the promotion of holistic development in the primary interest of Africa that NEPAD was designed as a programme to eradicate poverty; place the continent on the path to sustainable growth and development; halt or reverse the marginalisation of the continent in the global economy; and accelerate the empowerment of women and the youth. These ideals have continued to drive and shape our efforts since then. What is more fascinating is that the idea of NEPAD has captured the interest of the world.

Our development partners, without exception, have endorsed the programme and conceded that it has to be driven by Africans to serve the interests of Africa. This is perhaps the very first time that a programme for growth and development, initiated by Africans has received such overwhelming endorsement from the global community.

The evidence of global support for NEPAD can be seen in the regular invitations to African leaders to the meetings of the G8, the Davos Forum and other economic fora. These engagements have deepened understanding of NEPAD and resulted in special partnership arrangements such as the **G8 Africa Action Plan** as well as other agreements with regional blocs and major economic powers. Most recently was the institutionalisation of the expanded G8/NEPAD dialogue through the African Partnership Forum (APF) which in itself is perhaps the most representative and comprehensive partnership forum dedicated to African issues.

There is therefore a realization that in contemporary Africa, NEPAD is the real and only game in town and we are resolutely committed to it. However, to sustain this claim and perspective, to retain the support of our partners, and to continue to mobilize our peoples in support of the programmes of NEPAD, African leaders and governments have certain responsibilities. These include the resolution of persisting conflicts especially through the strengthening of the mechanisms for conflict resolution; promoting democratic ideals, values and practices; maintaining macro-economic stability and prudent fiscal policies and management; initiating and implementing policies that enhance social stability and development especially in the areas of education, health and rural development; diversifying the economic foundations of their respective nations and building institutional and human capacity to cope with reforms and the challenges of globalisation, and removing the suffocating and crippling consequences of the debt burden.

I am pleased to note that virtually all African states are executing one form of reform package or the other with the overall objective of repositioning themselves for growth, stability, development and democracy. I can say without hesitation that our resolve to

work together has never been stronger and that we are collectively committed to meeting the goals of NEPAD. Our recent launching of the Pan African Parliament as part of the effort at democratic consolidation and promotion of good governance; the on-going effort at instituting the African Court of Human Rights as part of the efforts of promoting a conducive context for socio-economic harmony and social justice; as well the blossoming of the African Peer Review Mechanism, a voluntary accession to a process that ensures the sustenance of good governance and democratic development, are indicators of our new drive for a better, more stable, progressive, and conflict-free Africa. More than ever before, we are witnessing the implementation of programmes that transcend national borders, regional economic communities are more effective, and nations are cooperating on the design and implementation of strategic projects. The recent cooperation agreement on energy between South Africa and Mozambique is a case in point and so is the West African gas pipeline. In addition, the improved performance of many African states in several sectors such as health, education, the campaign against HIV/AIDS pandemic, infrastructural development, and especially in agriculture are indicators of a new and measurable commitment to true development. Fortunately, this has been acknowledged by several agencies of the UN as well as in the African Development Report of 2004.

Allow me to use this opportunity to point out to our development partners and the global community at large that the adoption of NEPAD as a programme of the AU does not mean that we no longer require assistance. Resources are still scarce while needs are ever increasing. The adoption of NEPAD is actually a signal to a new determination, a new vision and a new commitment to the transformation and repositioning of Africa.

If anything else, it is a call for more support that would be targeted at definitive, implementable and measurable programmes. In this context, I call for more support for our political initiatives, debt relief especially for all African countries, more investments especially in capital-intensive projects, infrastructure, and capacity building.

It is very troubling that our development partners are not seen as keeping sufficiently to their promises. Luckily, this time around the reasons for not fulfilling pledges made to Africa will not be due to instability, unmitigated corruption, lack of planning and focus or some such excuses often adduced in the past. By not keeping to their promises to assist NEPAD, our partners will unwittingly be fulfilling the doubts raised at the beginning by some observers that we would not receive such support. If the Millennium Development Goals are to be met, the political will, which I know does exist, must be generated to support NEPAD and Africa. Promises that were made in Kananaskis, Evian and Sea Side in the United States earlier this year have not been actively and successively followed up. While we are thankful for the small mercies of the HIPC debt-policy as well as the renewal of AGOA, there are other critical and substantive policies that need to be put in place to enable Africa build the capacity to respond to globalisation, take care of internal challenges, and participate in the global economy as effective partners. This is our desire. We need a lifeline to get out of the pit so that together we can make the world safer and more secure. A wholesome and harmonious world can only be achieved through just, fair and equitable distribution of global resources.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we know why we are here. From the programme put in place for this dialogue, I am convinced that we would be richer in knowledge and this would make invaluable contributions to our abilities to work harder for Africa. Again, I thank you all for coming and wish us all a very productive dialogue in the interest of NEPAD, Africa and the world.

Thank you and may God continue to bless Africa.