

# **Africa Day Symposium 2001 A Message from Tokyo**

**The African Diplomatic Corps in Japan  
and the  
United Nations University**

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## **Background and Introduction**

Each year, in celebration of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Diplomatic Corps in Japan (ADC) and the United Nations University (UNU) jointly organize an international symposium on pressing issues of human security and development in Africa. The keynote lecturer at the 2001 Africa Day symposium was His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of Nigeria. The theme of the symposium was the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP), the new strategy being developed by the continent and for the continent.

This year's symposium was held on 22 May 2001 in the U Thant International Conference Hall (3F) at the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan. The 2001 symposium was intended to familiarize stakeholders in Japan with the background and substance of the MAP as well as to gain constructive feedback from Africa's partners in development - from academia, the business community, civil society and other concerned groups.

## **Main Messages from the Conference: Four Key Issues**

The conference emphasized the timeliness of the MAP initiative, building on the consensus of the UN Millennium Assembly and the commitments of the Millennium Declaration to eradicate poverty in Africa. The presentations and discussion at the Africa Day conference highlighted a great number of issues related to the MAP in particular and African human security in general. In this message we would like to highlight five key issues that emerged:

1. Putting "The Peoples" Front and Center in any Strategy - In order to effectively address improvement of the lives of ordinary people on the continent, the MAP must put "the peoples" front and center. The proof of the MAP's value will be in how and to what degree it improves the lives of ordinary African men, women and children.
2. Education, Education, Education - It has been commented that Africa's top three priorities should be "education, education and education." Without

investing more in its people, Africa will not be able to sustain rapid growth and reduce poverty. There was a call for more commitments and action to improve the educational levels and standards in Africa - especially in terms of primary school enrollments and gender equity at primary and secondary levels. But the Symposium particularly emphasized the need to strengthen education at all levels and in all sectors. This very much includes higher education, since an Africa without a sustainable, strong knowledge sector of its own will always remain in a dangerously dependent position. The Symposium also stressed the importance of linking education and training programmes more closely to the national development needs of each country as well as to local economic conditions and labour market needs.

3. Regional Cooperation and Integration - The MAP aims at realizing the opportunities of regional dynamism. There would seem to be great potential for African countries to promote regional interaction and markets - as important in themselves as well as in helping Africa better integrate into the global economy. Consolidation at the regional level would enable Africa to benefit from economies of scale, both on the supply side in exporting to external markets as well as on the demand side in importing products. Building regional and continental infrastructure networks in transport and telecommunications, one of the major pillars of the MAP, would help promote efficiency and regional integration. There is also scope for African governments to pool resources in developing and strengthening regional institutions that would promote greater flows of trade and investment.

4. Strengthening Africa's Infrastructure - The provision of infrastructure is at the center of any strategy to spur economic growth and to reduce poverty. If Africa is to provide its producers and populations, particularly the poor, with reliable and affordable basic services in the areas of water, sanitation, energy, transport and communication, there will need to be massive infrastructure investments in the coming years. In particular, the ongoing revolution in information and communication technology has far-reaching implications for the future of Africa. If Africa is to link to global information infrastructures, it will need to provide much greater access to the Internet for its populations and at much lower prices. Such initiatives could generate major results relatively quickly and are also likely to receive significant support from Africa's partners.

5. Increasing Resource Flows and Reducing the Debt Burden - There was a clear recognition at the Symposium that sustained development in Africa rests on three pillars: (i) increased mobilization of internal and external resources; (ii) meaningful debt relief; and (iii) leveraging trade and investment into accelerated economic growth. While recognizing the vital importance of improving trade performance, the conference clearly underlined the need to increase ODA to Africa. On the protracted debt-overhang issue, there was a call for speedy, meaningful debt relief as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for development in Africa, particularly if the resources provided are additional. Participants recognized that current initiatives have fallen short of expectations and that there could be scope for African countries to be proactive in their search for a solution to

the debt issue. One suggestion at the conference was the creation of an African Debt Management Fund (ADMF), at regional and sub-regional levels, within the current economic and monetary groupings. The Fund could help manage sovereign debt, act as an intermediary with creditors and assist in training national debt managers. The Economic Commission for Africa in cooperation with sub-regional economic communities could undertake a feasibility study for such an African initiative.

### **ADC-Tokyo and UNU: A Bridge between Africa and Japan**

The partnership with Japan, a major economy and large donor of ODA, was emphasized at the recent conference. This was particularly appropriate given the first Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in 1993, TICAD II in 1998, the initiation of a dialogue between Africa and the G-8 during the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit and the intention to hold TICAD III. But it must also be emphasized that relations increasingly go beyond government - to businesses, NGOs, researchers and the public.

In addition to seeking feedback from Africa's partners, such as the European Union and United Nations, the African Diplomatic Corps in Japan (ADC) and the United Nations University (UNU) can play a particular role as a "bridge" between Africa and Japan. We are sending the findings of this year's Africa Day Conference in Tokyo to major stakeholders. Particular targeted events include the Organization of African Unity Meeting in Lusaka in July and the TICAD Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo in December 2001. We will also send the findings to the Economic Commission for Africa, the European Union, the United Nations, the Global Coalition for Africa and the World Bank.

The conference very much endorsed the idea that the MAP should be viewed as a process. Thus, in order to enhance its legitimacy and wide acceptance and recognition, discussions on the issues and strategies involved will need to take place at all levels, national and regional. There is also a need for an explicit communication strategy to further promote the contents and commitments of the MAP and build support for the development of, and partnership with, Africa. In order to mobilize the support of the world community and to help implement the MAP, there will need to be regular channels for consultation. In this regard, and reflecting the experience of the Africa Day Symposia in Tokyo, it might be useful to organize annual forums for discussing and reviewing the MAP in the capital cities of Africa's major development partners.

The African Diplomatic Corps in Japan and the United Nations University have agreed to hold another Africa Day Symposium in 2002, and look forward with working with all partners from the region and around the world.

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