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Office of the President

SYMPOSIUM
OF THE AFRICAN GROUP OF TOKYO

ON

THE ROLE OF INFRASTRUCTURES IN
DEVELOPMENT
AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
BY
HIS EXCELLENCY
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**Ladies and Gentlemen,
Ambassadors,
Representatives of international institutions,
Rector of the United Nations University,
Honoured guests,**

I should like to begin by expressing my warmest thanks to the African Group of Tokyo for bringing forward its Africa Day celebrations to coincide with my visit to Japan.

I am delighted to be taking part in your discussions on

The role of infrastructures in development and regional integration,

a subject that could hardly be more topical or more relevant in the present context, marked by the recent launch of both the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Indeed, I believe it is from this dual perspective that this subject should be addressed.

By launching the African Union last July in Durban, Africa's leaders wished to speed up the process of integration and step up their efforts to achieve the unification of the continent.

As we shall see, NEPAD was born from the combination of a **philosophy** (the African Renaissance) and a **strategy** (to catch up with the world's developed countries).

The third element to be considered is the phenomenon of globalization, with all its attendant opportunities and demands (including innovation, creativity, and the ability to be competitive). Globalization is a simple fact of life for everybody, Africans included. Our task now is to use it as best we can by facing up to competition and to our competitors.

As Vice-President of the NEPAD Implementation Committee, I should like to remind you of its most important aspects.

NEPAD was created at a time of profound African crisis: an acute economic crisis, marked by economic decline and an unprecedented increase in poverty; a crisis of core values, which has left the youth of Africa disoriented, increasingly devoid of self-confidence and prone to take refuge in mysticism; a crisis of confidence that has made African people increasingly fatalistic; and a crisis of a continent out of control, lagging behind the rest, and frightened at the prospect of facing globalization and competition.

In the wake of African independence, many expert plans were adopted, amid an atmosphere of heady optimism. No sooner were those plans adopted, however, than they were mothballed, even before they began: the LAGOS plan, which was to have created an African community in 20 years; the ABUJA plan; the PANUREDA plan, and so on.

Africa seemed to have lost its way following the failure of all development policies attempted until now. Now it is seeking to reconcile with itself, by embracing the philosophy of "African Renaissance" which was inspired by Mr Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, who quickly shared his vision with President Olesgun Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. The outcome of their reflections was the **Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP)**, which offered an analysis of the historical impoverishment of Africa (slavery, colonization and unfair trade) as well as an appeal to Africa's political leaders to take action.

At the same time, Senegal's **OMEGA Plan**, a "catching-up theory", proposed ways and means to bridge the divides that separate us from developed countries. After vying with each other for a brief period, the two plans were merged to form the New African Initiative, which was subsequently renamed the New Partnership for Africa's Development, or NEPAD in order to incorporate the element of partnership with developed countries.

The essential focuses, or parameters, of NEPAD are: *good public and private governance*, emphasis on the *private sector* rather than the public sector as the main source of financing of the African economy, and the use of the *region* as the operational unit (instead of the State, which has limited territory). Essentially, today's topic addresses this first phase of NEPAD.

Within these parameters, NEPAD has identified eight priority sectors, or variables, which are to be implemented together, in accordance with certain choices that will ultimately define the type of development desired: **(1) infrastructures, (2) education, (3) health, (4) agriculture, (5) New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT), (6) the environment, (7) energy, and (8) access to the markets of developed countries.** A given type of development can be achieved by placing more or less emphasis on one or more of these variables.

Remember that we are talking about a choice between certain strategic variables. That does not mean that other issues are not important, but rather that these variables are leading sectors, which have a major impact.

You will have noted that infrastructures occupy first place, and you have asked me why that is the case.

The word *infrastructures* refers not just to physical phenomena, such as roads, ports, airports, railways, bridges etc...., but also to the New Information and Communication Technologies, or NICT (which, significantly enough, are also often referred to as the information and communication highways).

All these parameters are essential to growth, development and integration.

Many of us thought that the debate over whether the road should come before or after the economic activity was well behind us. And yet, some of our western partners are now asking us to give priority to the fight against AIDS or malaria, or against poverty.

Let us look at this issue.

1) These partners are essentially suggesting that we do that which their countries did not do when they were at the same level of development as we are now:

- When the Europeans arrived in America, they began by constructing a highway and a railway to the Great West, without really understanding what they might find there. The road and the railway led to the development of the regions they crossed.
- The Russians did the same in Siberia.
- We might also mention Australia or South Africa.

- When they arrived in Africa, the Europeans constructed roads from the interior to the ports in order to export mining or agricultural products. The economic activity came later.

Transport is a cost. Therefore, African producers who wish to export and take on international competition will never succeed if they must travel along rough roads or tracks: loss of time, loss of product quality ... etc.

Even if the situation may vary from one country to another, it is the poverty of infrastructures that best defines the general state of this sector in Africa, thus constituting a major obstacle to the development and integration of the continent.

By way of illustration, according to the annual report on African integration, published in March 2002 by the ECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa), the cost of a phone call in Africa is, on average, 250 per cent more expensive than in Europe; a plane trip from Abuja to Bamako can cost as much as 250 per cent more than a flight from Amsterdam to New York; and freight shipping costs between Addis Ababa and Abidjan can cost 350 per cent more than between Tokyo and Abidjan.

Under conditions such as these, Africa will never be able to compete in the world of international trade.

In rural areas, which is where some 70 per cent of Africans live, the absence of water infrastructures means that two-thirds of the population have no access to drinking water and sanitation services. More than four out of five people in rural areas have no access to electricity.

Africa's disadvantage is even more striking in the area of new information and communication technologies. Only 0.1 per cent of Africans have access to the Internet. The North-South divide may widen further if no concrete steps are taken to reduce, if not close, this critical **“digital divide”**.

Under such conditions, any talk of development or integration, or of the free movement of persons and goods, has more to do with fantasy than with a viable social project.

It is this situation that NEPAD seeks to end by including infrastructures among its major priorities.

With respect to the design of projects, as I remarked at an international conference on the OMEGA Plan on 11 June 2002, in Dakar, it is essential that we break with **“nation-centred thinking”** by **using the region as the departure point and the continent as the destination point**.

The region was thus chosen as the operational unit for development policies in the area of infrastructures, and NEPAD offers the best form of regional integration.

In addition to national roads, NEPAD concerns:

- Inter-regional roads;
- Transnational roads;
- Continental roads.

Moreover, certain sectors well suited to integration:

- Universities and major regional colleges;
- Health centres, police stations, and border schools that should be made accessible to the population, regardless of their country of origin;
- NICT, which essentially include networks, cables, and satellites, and thus cannot be “national”.

Former US Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater, who was above all else an expert in this area, rightly declared:

“Transportation is about more than concrete, asphalt and steel. It is about connecting people to people and people to services. It is about creating links between communities and promoting the integration of regional blocs and markets.

“It is about creating jobs and more economic opportunities. Transportation is thus the tie that binds, links, and integrates”.

I should like to say a word about the financing of infrastructures (that is, about the development of Africa).

That development will certainly not be achieved through aid (which is almost stagnant) or through loans, which have produced the insoluble debt problem. Ever since it achieved independence, Africa has followed those same two paths. And yet, after a period of 40 years, they have brought us to a dead end. That is why I referred to the “**aid/loan**” combination as the “**infernal duo**”: abandon all hope, all ye who enter here!

The financing of NEPAD should primarily be a matter for private investment, if necessary together with the public sector, and within the context of a mutually beneficial partnership. In a continent where everything, or almost everything, remains to be constructed, it is a question of creating the right conditions for attracting private investment by minimizing the risks to which private investors may be exposed.

Ultimately, then, the challenge we need to face is to create an environment in which “**the advantage of investing**” is clearly apparent and in which business security is assured.

In order to meet that challenge, NEPAD will focus on two main areas:

- Good political governance, which requires democracy, peace, political stability, a constitutional state, respect for human rights, and sound management of public affairs;
- Good economic governance, which requires a business-friendly environment, an independent legal system, the elimination of corruption, and secure investment conditions.

This is the price we must pay if we are to ensure that public partners and, more especially, private partners are willing to participate in NEPAD projects.

Assuming that the conditions for profitability are in place, there is nothing to prevent a private company from participating in road construction by financing certain stretches on a toll basis.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe the infrastructure component has made a strong beginning, and for the following reasons.

In Dakar, on 31 January, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo signed the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP) Treaty, for a gas pipeline that will stretch over 600 km and provide 3,640,000 m³ of Nigerian gas per day to the power stations and industries of Benin, Ghana and Togo.

Costing a total of 500 million dollars, the project is wholly funded by a private company called the West African Gas Pipeline Company Limited, whose shareholders are the Volta River Authority of Ghana, the Société Togolaise de Gaz, the Société Béninoise de Gaz, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Chevron and Shell.

As NEPAD's operational arm in the region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one of the initiators of the project, and is responsible for its coordination.

In its second phase, the project will be expanded to include Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.

This is a concrete model for development and integration at the regional level, but also for collaboration between public and private sectors.

I might also cite the Southern African Interconnection Network, which comprises the national electricity companies of the 12 member States of the South African Development Community (SADC), which is fully operational as coordinator of regional activities for the construction of new infrastructures and the production and

conveyance of electricity.

Other concrete projects are underway, such as the road from Casablanca to Dakar, jointly financed by Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal, with a bridge at Rosso; the road linking Dakar with the Indian Ocean, probably to Mombassa in Kenya; the Algiers-Bamako road; the Tripoli-Niamey-Lagos road; and the bridge and dam over the Gambia River (a joint Senegal-Gambia project). NEPAD has identified a total of 14,000 kilometres of trans-regional and continental highways.

As far as NICT are concerned, there are fibre optic cables linking Europe and America to Dakar, Pretoria, and Kuala-Lumpur in Malaysia, with intermediary branches to the interior.

The urgent need today is to close the digital divide that separates the world into two separate parts that communicate less and less. The South, which is under-equipped in the new information and communication technologies, remains isolated from the expertise and knowledge developed in the North.

That is why I have proposed the concept of “digital solidarity” as a way to bridge the digital divide on the road to the e-civilization.

Our quest for expertise and our efforts to bridge the divide depend on our ability to acquire these technologies.

The potential opportunities are many, but there are also many areas of concern. Africa, which discovered writing before the rest of humanity, is now largely illiterate, and runs the real risk of being excluded from the temple of a universal knowledge to which it has contributed in countless ways (to take just one example, the revelation of the mystery of the “golden section”).

The fabulous technological wealth of certain countries has given rise to the fascinating “e-economy”. And yet, those countries must not become intoxicated by knowledge and power. In this context, we might do well to reflect on this passage from the Old Testament:

“So that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together” (Genesis 13:6).

What exactly is digital solidarity, and what are its implications?

In certain regions of the world, monetary policy is shared among two or more countries with a view to stabilizing exchange rates, which must remain between two parameters. In a similar way, digital solidarity defines the information society according to a range of values located between two parameters (**digital parameters**).

Those values reflect the degree of accessibility to the information society: number of computers per inhabitant, number of websites, telecommunications penetration rate, etc...

The higher parameter does not refer to countries with the most advanced communications media (**high digital density**), because that would be to set the bar too high over the short term. The criteria for the information society, which corresponds to the area between the two parameters, are defined according to the objectives of the international community: number of computers per family/per person, number of telephones ... etc. These criteria, which can be easily adjusted, are presently being defined by a group of experts, whose conclusions and recommendations will be included in a *Charter of digital solidarity* to be drawn up by a team of legal specialists.

The lower parameter represents the threshold for countries that are “excluded” from the information society.

As it develops, the information society will progressively find its bearings, attract more members, and climb toward the top (the highest digital density). For that reason, we refer to it as the “digital ladder”.

Digital solidarity is about helping those countries that lie beneath the lower threshold to “step onto the ladder”, so to speak, and about helping those already on the ladder to stay there. To make this happen, we have proposed the creation of a **Digital solidarity foundation** which will set up a **Digital solidarity fund**. Based in Geneva, the fund would manage funds acquired through **voluntary contributions**. Voluntary contributions would be made in coordination with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations, civil society, the international private sector and individual States. For example, it might be possible to contribute 0.5 cent per international call, \$1 per computer sold or purchased, \$1 per router sold or purchased, etc. The funds would be used to purchase equipment for countries excluded from the information society, so that they can begin to climb the ladder.

Thus, digital solidarity will enable the international private sector to access new markets whose technological purchasing power and information technology industry will be significantly improved as a result.

The proposed initiative will be a joint endeavour, and all of us must demonstrate the necessary wisdom and foresight to make it a reality. In the words of Confucius:

“He who does not look ahead will soon stumble”.

The many peoples that make up our modern world are all subject to the laws of human destiny and must all live together, in full knowledge of each other’s existence.

Either they will communicate or they will not.

The new information and communication technologies constitute a formidable trading tool. The Web is where cultures meet. It is where the civilizations of the world will be able to contribute their arts, their wisdom, and their accumulated history – provided that we, their leaders, are prepared to meet the challenge of Digital Solidarity.

In this context, I would cite the following passage from the Koran:

“O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another.”
(Koran, 49:13)

These words of wisdom from the Muslim religion echo those of the Old Testament and of Confucius referred to earlier, in identifying communication as the purpose of man’s existence.

An international committee of sponsors, comprising Senegal for Africa, India for Asia, Russia and France for Europe, Canada and the United States for North America, and Brazil for South America, is presently being constituted.

As for Senegal, it is preparing resolutely for the communication society. On 4 March, the US administration launched the **Digital Freedom Initiative** in favour of countries of the South. Senegal was chosen to be the first beneficiary of the initiative, in a programme worth 6.5 million dollars. It is estimated that more than 500,000 Senegalese will benefit from the positive effects of this initiative, which also targets small and medium size businesses.

Still on the subject of NICT, I might give the interesting example of a successful experience with “distance medicine” conducted by the Senegalese organization “**Education and Health**”, in cooperation with a French non-governmental organization.

A team of doctors based in Dakar was asked to provide a long-distance diagnosis of a pregnant woman who was in Kédougou, located 740 kilometres away in one of Senegal’s most inaccessible regions. The woman lay on an examination table, and a doctor sat at her side with a suitcase containing the examination equipment.

The woman watched her baby in her womb, sucking its thumb, and the doctors in Dakar watched with her. They were able to make an immediate diagnosis.

This concrete example is addressed by Laurent Fontaine in his article “**Distance medicine in Senegal: take the Internet and take it easy**” (**Interface**, November/December 1999).

Women usually have to travel hundreds of miles, either on foot or by donkey, simply to see a nurse, because there are no doctors.

The train bearing the new information and communication technologies is already underway, and Africa must act now to get on board. As I have had occasion to remark to UNESCO, it is better to take that train - even in a third-class carriage, if necessary - than not to take the train at all.

That spirit of pragmatism encapsulates NEPAD's entire philosophy.

The vision of a developed and fully integrated African Union will not be realized until modern infrastructures enable its inhabitants and their products and services to overcome the obstacle of distance and the challenge of isolation.

Thank you very much.

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