

Key Note Address

By

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**Mr. Secretary General,  
Madam Deputy Secretary General,  
Under and Assistant Secretary General,  
Advisors, Special Envoys and Special Guests,  
Distinguished Participants:**

I am truly honored to have been selected to join you for this extraordinary retreat, for the opportunity to reflect and exchange views and experiences on the challenges which the United Nations faces within the context of its own reform and changing global dynamics.

Mr. Secretary General, Colleagues, permit me first to start these remarks by a brief recount of the situation in the two areas of my passion – Africa and Liberia.

As many of you know, I come from a small West African Country, Liberia, a country which is a microcosm not only of Africa's terrible tragedy but also the recent emergence of hope. The past thirty years 1970-2000 have been disastrous for the people of Africa. While the Asian Tigers recorded some of the fastest growth rates and reduction in poverty recorded in world history, most of Africa remained mired in poverty.

Fortunately, the bad news has begun to change. Slowly but surely, a growing number of African Countries are beginning to turn around – ending conflicts, installing good governments, implementing stronger economic policies and getting back on their feet. But because it is good news, and because it is happening gradually, it generally does not get the attention it deserves.

To make a point, in 1989 there were just four democracies in all of Sub-Sahara Africa: Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius and Senegal. Then the shift began, starting with South Africa and its neighbors in Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique. It spread slowly across the continent, unevenly to be sure with some reversals, but undeniably – reaching Benin, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Madagascar, Mali, Tanzania, Sierra Leone and several others. Today there are eighteen democracies. In the space of a generation, Africa has gone from very few democracies to more than one third of the continent. Importantly, the shift to democracy has gone hand in hand with vastly improved macroeconomic management by bringing under control economic distortions such as high rates of inflation, large budget deficit, grossly undervalued exchange rates, and large trade gaps.

Today 31 countries have qualified for the first stage of debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative and 22 of these have completed the process. The end of the debt crisis for these countries means improved financial position of government to increase spending in health, education, infrastructure or civil service wages. While the region is still off track in meeting the majority of the Millennium Development Goals, significant gains have been made in reducing the number of people living in poverty and in increasing school enrollment.

The Liberian experience is similar. For the past two decades, the world came to know Liberia as a land of political comedy, widespread corruption and unimaginable brutality. Liberia became the strange footage that flickered on television success with terrible images of savagery. The Liberian people became refugees and fled to all corners of the globe for shelter. It was a period of distress and insanity.

Fortunately for Liberia two things have finally begun to change. We have joined the ranks of democracies after the successful multiparty elections of 2005 and we expect to join the ranks of the HIPC Countries very soon. We know that our new government faces the daunting task of rebuilding Liberia from the ashes of war. We recognize that to be successful, we will need to implement policies aimed at both political stability and economic recovery that are mutually reinforcing. We are mindful that to sustain development over time, we will have to rebuild institutions and invest in human capacity.

Crucially, for Liberia to be successful, we cannot simply recreate the economic and political structures of the past that led to widespread income disparities, economic political marginalization and deep social cleavages. We must create much greater economic and political opportunities for all Liberians, not just for a small elite class; and ensure that the benefits from growth are spread more equitably throughout the populations. We must decentralize political structures, provide more political power to the counties and districts, build transparency and accountability into government decision-making and create stronger systems of checks and balances across all three branches of government.

In our ongoing processes of reform and national renewal, the obstacles or challenges that we face are matched by the opportunities. Our responsibility is to ensure that the opportunities prevail, clearly overcoming the obstacles, resulting in Liberia becoming a model post conflict success story.

The United Nations is an important partner in Liberia's quest for success. Intervention by the U.N in our national saga did not come early in a conflict that was rooted in various forms of exclusion and marginalization for most of the country's existence. It did not come in the latter part of the 1970's when all indications pointed to a looming crisis nor did it come in the decade of gross mismanagement and dictatorship after the April 1980 coup d'etat which marked the beginning of the steep descent into crisis. Intervention, judged too little too late, finally took place two years after a devastating war in the form of a limited Observer Mission (UNOMIL) which monitored the effort of containment by the regional force (ECOMOG) which had earlier intervened.

As you well know, much has changed in UN intervention – from the traditional peacekeeping activity of the cold war era to the 1990 more robust response to what was called complex emergencies resulting from a breakdown in authority on account of internal conflict.

Under Brutus Brutus Ghali's Agenda for Peace the Security Council reasserted its role as the institution with primary responsibility to intervene in ensuring peace and security,

but also ceded a role and certain responsibilities to regional bodies. The contribution of ECOMOG and UNOMIL in Liberia represented one of the first major attempts of this cooperation.

I believe that I am correct in saying that UN intervention today takes its concept and its scope from the December 2004 report of the High Level Panel on Threat Challenge and Change which endorses the emerging norm that there is collective international responsibility to protect exercisable by the Security Council authorizing military intervention as a last resort. The principle of “the responsibility to protect” thus gives the UN the right to intervene in any given national or regional situation if the citizens of that country or region are under threat of repression which could lead to subsequent loss of lives, liberties or reasonable welfare.

In justifying this principle former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan at the United Nations General Assembly in 1999 posed this question: “If humanitarian intervention is indeed an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, or to a Srebrenica or to gross and systematic violation of human rights that affect every precept of our common humanity?”

UN intervention today thus go beyond peacekeeping operations, most times under a chapter 7 mandate but includes the combination and coordination of intrusive activities that could affect every aspect of the nation’s body polity. Liberia’s current reform efforts benefits and suffers from this intrusion.

Let us revisit some of the political issues that are attendant in the scope of this intervention and within the context of the challenge that face African Countries in general and post conflict countries in particular.

First, peace and security, without which there can be no sustained effort in economic performance or in reconstruction nor in any other area of national development endeavor.

The timing and, resultingly, the cost of UN intervention is critical. I note that you will be discussing later today, the concept of preventive diplomacy and I know that my good friend, Mary Robinson, will bring rich ideas and experience to the discussion. As I see it, this implies UN intervention before a real crisis emerges.

Admittedly, this is not an area of UN strength as there is the potential of rejection or of tension on the part of countries which might use the sovereignty card. Yet, we must find a way to bring the skills and authority of the UN to prevent the outbreak of conflict. For example, there is every reason to engage a Guinea or a Niger or a Zimbabwe now while the chances of prevention are high and the cost of intervention reasonable. In each of these cases, the question is when and how. The *when* is answered under conditions of intermittent clashes among opposing forces in an environment of centralized and weak political systems shored up by a strong and tenured military. The *how* is more difficult.

Clearly at this stage, what is required is a sustained political effort buttressed by similar action on the part of the most influential bilateral Security Council partners.

Once conflict has started, there is no other alternative to achieve peace and security but to send in the UN Peacekeepers composed as national and regional politics will dictate. On intervention, the critical issue is the pace, the urgency of program implementation as a means of minimizing the chances of return to conflict. There is also the need for a carefully planned and timed exit strategy consistent with the country's capacity and progress in assuming these responsibilities. The premature withdrawal of a peacekeeping force could provide the basis for dissenting forces to undermine a costly won fragile peace. On the other hand, the prolonged presence of a peacekeeping force in itself sends a signal of instability thereby undermining the confidence of potential external investors and of citizens as well.

In Liberia, the peacekeeping forces continue to play an indispensable role in containing and responding to any threat of violence. They are also involved in the training of the Police Force and, what we consider an innovative departure from tradition in the building of roads by Engineering Units in those areas of the mandate of their contingents.

The second issue has to do with governance, defined in the broad context of ownership, leadership, choice, resource management, justice, capacity development and decentralization.

Within these definitional confines lies the possibility of perceived contradictions. For example, we still grapple in Liberia and perhaps with other post conflict countries as well, with the right balance between justice and reconciliation between the rightful benefits that should accrue to youth combatants who engaged in death and destruction and to their innocent victims who were forced to flee in terror. The Truth and Reconciliation attempt to deal with this through a weighing of the various forms of justice and Human Rights groups call for various forms of reparation to heal the wound on all sides. Yet the contradictions remain.

Liberia is looking for the good examples, the lessons of experience from these countries such as Mozambique and Rwanda which have been successful in post conflict transition.

In any case, the nature, pace and potential impact of UN intervention in governance, particularly in post conflict situations are to a large extent determined by the scope and size of UN Operations.

In these cases when the intervention is limited in scope and focus, the processes of reconstruction and democratic institution building are largely internally driven with positive effect on ownership, capacity development and the exercise of choice.

In other situations, where conflicts have been resolved through military intervention, there is the likelihood that there will be an attempt by the UN to dictate the scope and

content of governance intervention. This leads to distortion and confusion if there is a lack of harmony with traditional structures and practices.

Similarly, in cases where national capacity is low and the political leadership weak, and where intervention is a result of the collapse of the State, the UN could control the processes of transition including the nature and pace of governance intervention. The issue of sustainability after UN departure then becomes a challenge.

In still other cases where national capacity is stronger, particularly in civil society organizations, the issue of ownership is paramount, creating tensions between the UN and local stakeholder groups if UN Operations are intrusive. This in turn could lead to delays in program implementation and undermine external support for certain needed governance interventions. One solution in this regard is to shift from external to local staffing in UN operations wherever possible, as a means of reducing the level of tension.

Liberia's experience in this regard speaks clearly to the issue of leadership on both sides. By the time the new Government assumed leadership of the country in January, 2006 all of Liberia's Institutions were in ruins. A 15,000 strong Peacekeeping Force (now down to 14,000) matched by a multiple thousand civilian contingent versed in every area of national endeavor, and the added presence of almost all UN Agencies and Programs, clearly pointed to the potential of an externally dictated framework for enhanced governance. This threat has been contained by a strong and competent national leadership team, a vibrant and active partnership arrangement involving several bilateral and multilateral players and a UN leadership which is itself strong and committed to the principle of national ownership. Thus the need for matching UN leadership profile with country conditions cannot be overemphasized.

Let me say a little bit about the Liberia partnership arrangement – the famous Governance Economic Management program (GEMAP). As concerned for Liberia as a pilot country, GEMAP foreign experts would assume certain equal responsibilities as nationals in the management of the country's financial resources. Although perhaps concerned for other circumstances, my government found value in the technical skills inherent in the arrangement and has fully endorsed it. A major deficiency still exists as with other technical assistance programs – the lack of capacity development for sustainability. This fault has contributed to tensions between foreign and local experts thereby raising issues of ownership and sovereignty.

Our response is to continue to stress that ownership comes at the individual, organizational, community or national level from the freedom to express aspirations from an understanding of the potential and the limitations to achieve these aspirations, from confidence in the ability to develop creative options, to exercise choice, to be assured of the protection that comes from redress to be able to change the status quo.

A third political issue that is likely to influence the work of the United Nations is the call for democratization within the UN itself. The debate regarding a reconstitution of the Security Council continues unabated as more countries demand a more meaningful

voice – countries which carry a higher level of international responsibilities than was the case in the past and developing countries which are likely to be more affected by Security Council resolutions.

Gender equality or the participation of women in decision making roles will continue to be a political issue for the UN. While significant progress has been made worldwide, women still lag far behind men in parliament, in executive positions, in equal pay, etc. The UN which has taken the moral high ground on this issue by calling for a minimum 30 percent representation of women must now demonstrate its own commitment by achieving this result within the UN System. We commend the effort and the progress the Secretary General has made in this regard but women will continue to question this commitment unless the U.N body (UNIFEM) which has a mandate to respond to gender equity issues is provided with the scope and the resources to make a difference through its program intervention.

A final issue relates to the role which the UN plays in fostering national effort at building good regional and international relationship and restoring credit worthiness. The support for workshops, conferences and institutional exchanges add significant value to national initiatives. Cooperation among UN Peacekeeping Force and the exchange of intelligence information helps to ensure a containment of cross border movements that could threaten national and regional stability. Regular reports of the UN, particularly for post countries provide important insights that are sometimes missed by national leaders. However, special attention would need to be paid to the work of the Special Panels such as the Sanctions Panel on Liberia to ensure that the desire for self perpetuation does not undermine the need for accuracy in analysis and relevance in recommendations.

Liberia is particularly pleased that you Mr. Secretary General, is supporting our national effort in this regard. You have intervened on the issue of our country's effort to obtain debt relief. The response to this appeal has been overwhelming. We thank you.

In closing, let me say that this is the best opportunity in over two decades for Liberia to set its economic and financial house in order, to address poverty, to start the process of prosperity. But continued progress is far from assured unless Liberia and the partners seize the opportunity to accelerate the process toward a stronger, more accountable government, toward economic revival and national renewal based upon sustained growth and development, toward a post conflict success story that can serve as an example, a model for others.

Thank you.