

Opening Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At the African Union High-Level Committee Meeting on the Post-2015 Agenda
(African Common Position)
African Union Permanent Office
New York, New York
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Excellencies, Colleagues, Brothers and Sisters:

It is a pleasure to be here for the first meeting of the African Union's High-Level Committee, set up to ensure that the African Common Position is clearly incorporated in the formulation of the next global development agenda which will succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This is a unique opportunity to make our voices heard and participate in setting the new development agenda. In 2000, when the MDGs were approved, we had little say in what they were to be. We did not decide on the nature of the development goals, but we went along and each of our countries tried to achieve what it could within that framework.

The MDGs have indeed represented a framework that made a huge impact on recent development processes around the world. It influenced all of us as policy makers, oriented our thinking about what is human development, what is essential, and what we all have in common as one humanity. The MDGs, we admit, helped us to prioritize our policy actions and allocate resources. Work must continue on the MDGs to achieve those objectives and to carry the processes to their completion as much as possible.

However, this time around, we have a chance to make an impact on the decision-making process; we must all seize this opportunity and make the most out of it. Our task is complex, because we are expected to reach a continental consensus on development priorities – priorities that would be included in the global development framework being prepared by the United Nations. The African Union Commission has already done a lot of work in that direction, but much remains to be done: more consultations are needed to put in place a common approach to our challenges; and the second aspect of our work consists of negotiating with international partners to ensure that our vision, our priorities, are fully included in the new global development agenda.

As we prepare our Common Position, we must be aware of what other regions – far advanced in their work – have put together. We must look at how their priorities affect us and how our priorities align or go contrary to theirs. This will require consultations and negotiations not only amongst ourselves, but also at the global level. We are all mindful that we have a year to complete this process.

Given the importance of the task ahead, I urge all of us on the High-Level Committee to set up working groups, technical teams or expert groups to work exclusively on this issue. If we limit the Committee's work to intermittent meetings and the issuance of communiqués, we will fall behind. It took us too long to establish this Committee, which affected the three substantive meetings we should have held between June and September. I hope today we can now look ahead and work hard to define a roadmap for Africa's development. I urge you, dear colleagues, to consider this as a great priority for our continent.

Holding this first meeting in New York rather than in Monrovia or Pretoria or Addis Ababa clearly shows the difficulties we faced in getting organized. I hope that by the time we have our next meeting, proposed for November, as has been presented to us by the working group, we will have those structures in place to enable us to achieve the objectives of this process.

When I co-chaired the UN High-Level Panel appointed by the Secretary-General to develop recommendations on the post-2015 development agenda, there were four other Africans on the Panel, including Dr. Amina Mohammed who was with us. Over a very intense nine-month period, we travelled around the globe, and one thing I noticed – and we all share the view – is that many of the other regions have gone far ahead in their own work and the formulation of their strategic priorities. We now must put all of our efforts together so that we too adopt this Common Position, that we ensure that it does reflect our Common Position that is duly incorporated in the global agenda. This is an historic opportunity and I hope we all will seize it.

A strong continental position will also help to balance the opposing poles within the Group of 77, some pushing for very narrowly defined sustainability goals, focused purely on the environment as opposed to human development, others very keen to see a very simplistic extension of the MDGs with little space for the incorporation of new ideas and new issues. The emerging African position (shaped by the series of continental consultations run by the AUC, UNECA and UNDP) seeks to strike an appropriate balance of all these elements, emphasizing the need to retain many of the key elements of the MDGs, but seeking to complete them, while also including a greater focus on marginalized issues like governance, conflict and fragility and inclusive economic growth.

I am honored to chair this process and I believe that this represents for all of us an enormous potential. The HLC has the chance to make the Common Position something different. Drawing on the extensive consultations that have taken place over the past year and a half (as well as complimentary consultations orchestrated to inform the Monrovia High-Level Panel Meeting in January 2013), we can craft something that represents the breadth of the continent's diverse and unique society and shows Africa to be a continent rising.

I welcome all of you to this first session; I invite you, my dear colleagues, dear brothers and sisters, to spare no efforts in ensuring that we take this process to a new level of consultations and understanding of our continental priorities and the strategies we need to fulfill the promises that each one of us has made to our people.

Thank you.

Closing Remarks

This has been a very productive initial meeting, and I am delighted to hear common enthusiasm for developing a bold and ambitious African proposal on the post-2015 development agenda. We must be prepared, as Africans, to put our own resources behind our effort that our institutions need to be involved in this process; that there needs to be robust consultations in our own countries and among our countries.

We need to ensure that we continue to preserve the principles of economic, social and environmental emphasis such that the Common Position, already formulated by our institutions, can be, once again, looked at to make sure that it is a general consensus among our positions. Let me stress that financing is important. We also need to promote South-South cooperation.

We have all looked at the roadmap, as proposed by the Sherpas, and there seems to be an agreement that this roadmap is acceptable and we should proceed with that and the process that is inherent within that roadmap.

The African Commission will be the seat of coordination and of this process, whether we call it the secretariat, as proposed, or the technical committee as has been suggested by some. But the end objective will be the same, and the seat of coordination will be in Addis Ababa, at the African Commission Headquarters. We will all support that.

The meetings that have been identified in the roadmap have been generally agreed and for those who may have not had the opportunity to comment here, certainly if you have some views, they can be passed on to the Committee and taken into account.

The timeframe for our work is short as we have to complete this and have a report ready for the Summit in January of next year. But we would like to thank all of you, through your Sherpas and through the consultative process which you participated, that has enabled us reach this level of progress. We say to you that we want everyone to stay engaged, active and participatory in this process so that we do reflect what is the consensus: that Africa must take charge of its own agenda, its destiny, and the global agenda which is being formulated must, indeed, reflect that African consensus as to where we want our continent in the years after 2015.

Thank you for your participation, and good luck in all the many other meetings that we will all be participating in over the next few days. Thank you.