Office of the Commissioner for Peace and Security

Meeting of the Core Group, Munich Security Conference

Opening remarks by
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AU Commissioner for Peace and Security

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Your Excellency President Olusegun Obasanjo,
Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference,
Distinguished President Kohler,
Honorable Tedros Adhanom, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here to Addis Ababa, many of you for the first time. This is an opportunity for us to reciprocate the hospitality that the Munich Security Conference extended to us just recently. It is an opportunity to thank the leadership of the Munich Security Conference for putting Africa on the agenda of the Conference for the first time, and to make good on our promise to demonstrate that Africa has an integral place in the global security agenda.

Addressing the global security issues of our time requires an African input into the agenda: into framing the questions and developing the responses, and also an African partnership in implementing those responses.

The security challenges facing the world as a whole and those facing Africa are indivisible. It would not be possible for me to compile two separate lists, one entitled “global security challenges” and the other headed “African security challenges” and treat them differently. That approach might have been possible during the Cold War. Today, we must realize that global security is indivisible.
However, some global security challenges are primarily African, while others affect Africa less. For now, let me emphasize the integrated nature of international security challenges.

For instance, the crisis in the European Union affects Africa—and indeed vice versa, African realities affect Europe. This is clearest in the Mediterranean Sea which we see as a shared space between three continents. Distress migration to Europe, transnational organized crime, and armed militants are all a shared problem. They must be addressed by all of us in partnership, or they will not be solved.

Also with regard to the climate change, although Africa is the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change without really contributing to the escalation of the phenomenon, we have been actively engaged in the negotiations process and we are committed to comply with the global mitigation policies and standards.

Africa has much experience to contribute on a host of other global security issues. Let me give just three examples. This is not an exhaustive list: I present them to provoke our thinking.

One such issue is the agenda of stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In the wake of the historic agreement with Iran on nuclear issues, let us reflect that the only two countries in the world that have voluntarily given up advanced nuclear weapons programmes, are both African—South Africa and Libya. For sure, there are lessons to be learned from that.

Another is terrorism. Africa has rich experience in fighting terrorist groups, and also has unequalled experience in finding negotiated solutions to armed conflicts that involve groups labeled as terrorists. A few months ago, African mediators met for their annual retreat in Namibia to discuss these challenges.

A third is the mass migration of economic migrants and refugees. For most of Europe, receiving hundreds of thousands of distress migrants is a new and unwelcome phenomenon. Europe hasn’t seen anything like the current flows of
people across its eastern borders and over the Mediterranean Sea, since the end of World War Two.

But European policymakers who have travelled to Africa have found that, in this continent, we have been dealing with comparable numbers of migrants and refugees for decades. The numbers of Africans fleeing to Europe has suddenly spiked in the last few years. In Africa we have seen much larger numbers of migrants and refugees, the totals fluctuating year on year. For sure, Africa’s experience in hosting these people is relevant to Europe’s predicament.

**Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,**

There is a distinction to be made. That is between global problems that require international partnership, in which Africa should play a role or at least have a voice, and problems that are primarily internal to Africa, but for which we seek international partnership.

Let me enumerate several of the key strategic challenges facing Africa today.

One is sustaining equitable economic growth in a highly turbulent global economy. Africa’s oil producers have suffered from the sharp drop in the price of oil, even while its non-oil producers have benefited. The unpredictability of the global economy poses huge challenges for national economic planning, exposing us to high risks.

A second challenge is sustaining our progress in democratic governance. We have made vast strides in democratization over recent decades. The African Union has, in its Constitutive Act, a norm that prohibits unconstitutional change in government. We have succeeded in reducing military coups on the continent. However, we should admit that more efforts are needed in this path.

A third challenge is violent extremism: although violent extremism is a global phenomenon, we believe that the solutions to it must be found locally. This can include de-radicalization and ensuring opportunities to our youth in a comprehensive approach.
A fourth challenge, and one that preoccupies me particularly, is strengthening Africa’s peace and security architecture, and in particular, making our peace operations more effective and more sustainable.

More than eighty percent of the world’s peacekeepers are deployed in Africa. The African Union and our regional organizations are commonly the first responders to crises, dispatching troops at short notice. Our missions are diverse, ranging from unarmed military observers to fully-fledged combat missions. There is no single template for an African peace support operation.

Let me focus however on the question of how best to fund peace operations.

An effective peace operation is not a cheap option. That is especially the case if peacekeeping is to be run in a manner that meets the high standards demanded by the international community and indeed also by the African people. African nations have been ready to deploy their troops at short notice in highly dangerous environments.

Quite often, as in CAR, Mali or Somalia, we have deployed into situations in which the UN would not have been ready to deploy, on missions that the UN would not consider suitable. We are ready to deploy a peace operation where there is no peace to keep, or where the mission requires combat operations against terrorists.

But African nations struggle to find the sustainable funding for these operations. We have no mechanism like the United Nations’ assessed contributions for providing secure and reliable funding.

Our ablest leaders have grappled with this problem and committed themselves to fund 25% of AU-led Peace Support Operations in line with the initiative of President Obama, bearing in mind that the remaining 75% will be funded from the UN’s assessed contribution. Most recently, the African Union has appointed the former President of the African Development Bank, Dr. Donald Kaberuka, to design a clear roadmap on how to generate the 25%.

I am confident that with a strong international partnership we shall overcome the difficulties we face, and put African peace operations on a much sounder
financial footing. This will not only be of profound practical importance to our peace agenda, but will be a strong symbol of multilateral partnership.

I thank you for your kind attention.