

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE
MEETING OF MINISTERS OF PUBLIC AND CIVIL SERVICE IN
THE AFRICAN UNION**

Monday, 26 February 2007, Emperors' Palace, South Africa

Allow me to start with a poem from a little known South African poet¹
entitled ***“How do I know that I'm African?”***

”Is it the colour of skin?
Is it the language that I speak?
Or is it the beliefs of my ancestors?

I know this...

The first breath I took,
was of African air.
The first word I spoke,
Africa heard.
The first step I took,
was on African soil.
Every time my heart beats,
it beats for Africa.

I am African!”

These words points to the essence of what defines us as people of Africa:

Our sense of united pride; belonging to Mother Africa; and a deep desire to acknowledge our heritage and allegiance.

Some of these desires have been forged through a history in which many attempts were made to physically and psychologically separate us from Africa and the values and customs she imbues; a history where many of Africa's children experienced humiliation and subjugation We see our true Africaness expressed through history, literature, art, music, film, clothing, food and leadership. We know that sharing and celebrating our African-ness extends beyond borders

¹ Barbara Botha

and human limits. We know that being African extends beyond any tribal history and locational constraints – but rather hinges on a new kind of patriotism – not only for our respective African countries – but rather the continent as a whole and our rich heritage.

It is this ideal of a new kind of patriotism that calls upon all Africans to stand together to build an African powerhouse across all divides. An Africa that once again will take her place as the centre of civilization and development in the global set-up. But, Africa is at a crucial turning point. One which gives hope and meaning to millions of people, but which also shines as a glaring reminder of Africa's poverty ridden and conflict scorched landscape.

In his last speech to the African Union, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan reminded us of this dichotomy. He registered the following achievements we have registered during the more recent past:

- Compared to a decade ago, the number of violent conflicts has dropped dramatically. Africans are increasingly taking ownership of the peace and security agenda.
- Today the majority of African States -- more than ever before -- have democratically elected Governments. World Bank data shows that by 2002, Sub-Saharan Africa had a higher percentage of countries with Governments elected through multi-party elections than was the average for other developing regions of the world.
- in Sub-Saharan countries, the share of women in single or lower houses of parliament is higher than in the developing countries of southern or western Asia.
- Throughout Africa, voter turnout continues to rise.

In January this year, Abdoulaye Janneh, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the ECA, in his statement to the opening of the Executive Council of the AU reported that African economies continue to sustain the growth momentum, which has built up in recent years. In 2006, overall real GDP growth

rate accelerated from 5.2 percent recorded in 2005 to 5.7 percent. He recorded an expected growth rate in 2007 around 5.8 percent.

UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon speaking during the AU Summit earlier this month highlighted the remarkable progress many of our African countries have made towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Many of our low-income countries have lifted sizeable proportions of their citizens above the poverty line. Several are on course to meet the target of halving poverty by 2015. Around 15 African countries have already achieved universal primary education, or are on track to do so. And most Southern African countries are on course to attain gender parity at the primary school level.

However, evidence shows that overall Africa is unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Poverty and marginalization of Africa continue to stand in stark contrast to the prosperity of the developed world and within the continent, and especially my own country, we are noticing growing gaps between rich and poor, a trend often hidden by the aggregate economic growth statistics we tend to use.

With respect to Africa South of the Sahara 44% of our African population still live on less than a US \$1 per day. The mortality rate of children under 5 years of age is 168 per 1000. 31% of our people are still living with insufficient food, and 36% of our children are still not privy to primary education. These figures reveal adversity which can be met only when long term economic and political stability is supported by a strong, capable and effective public service cadre.

Unless we work out how to replicate our successes very fast, or new and vigorous approaches are adopted we will simply not make it. We have examples of thinking, though, that show the liberating force of “thinking out of the box”.

One of these radical shifts in thinking regarding poverty that is taking the world by storm is the work by the eminent Indian academic, professor C.K. Prahalad. He begins his book: ***The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*** with a simple yet

revolutionary proposition: If we stop thinking of the poor as victims or as a burden and start recognizing them as resilient and creative entrepreneurs and value-conscious consumers, a whole new world of opportunity will open up. Prahalad suggests that four billion poor people can be the engine of the next round of global trade and prosperity, and can be a source of innovation. Hence in South Africa, as well, the focus on the second economy.

More than 10 years ago when President Mbeki in his “*I am an African*” speech outlined the elements that would eventually be seen to comprise the African Renaissance it was also a radical mindshift from how we on the African continent have become used to see ourselves and have accepted the manner in which others have engaged with us. The African Renaissance were to be built on the principles of

- Social cohesion;
- Democracy;
- Economic reconstruction and growth;
- Establishing Africa as a significant player in geo-political affairs; and above all
- African ownership of our initiatives and accepting responsibility for our own destiny.

The African Renaissance became recognized as the “third moment” or “third wave” in post colonial Africa, following decolonization and the wave of democratisation across the continent we witnessed during the early 1990s. But in order for our Renaissance to be a meaningful part of our future we must ensure that its primary elements do not become simply symbols for rhetoric and political point scoring. We must ensure that effective institutional measures are implemented and continually renewed as practical short, medium and long term programmes create the pathway to Africa’s reconstruction.

One of the most important milestones to emerge as part of our African Renaissance is NEPAD. This was embraced by our African leaders. NEPAD defines in simple terms our challenge. If implemented the NEPAD initiatives can be the nucleus of our extrication from poverty, social underdevelopment, conflict and

economic failing. NEPAD is about consolidating and accelerating the progress we have made across Africa.

NEPAD's founding framework defines Africa's place in the global community by the fact that "the continent is an indispensable resource base that has served all humanity for so many centuries." As globalisation, technology advancement and the creation of a single world economy takes shape, the means and context for Africa's rejuvenation is clear. But this rejuvenation must be forged along the lines of the sectoral priorities as set out in NEPAD's founding framework in order to ensure the sustainable reconstruction of Africa and our ultimate Renaissance.

In terms of the NEPAD initiative the leaders of Africa pledged to work individually and collectively to enshrine in the fabric of African society peace and security; democracy; good governance; human rights and sound economic management – a testimony to this was the elections in the DRC in the recent past. As a conference of Ministers for Public and Civil Service we wish our congratulations to be conveyed to the DRC.

We see today that Africa still faces many challenges in this regard and unless there is long term stability around the principles of peace and security, achieving successful reconstruction and Renaissance of Africa will be limited.

Members of this meeting of Ministers of Public and Civil Services;

The nexus between our ability to render public services effectively and maintaining competent administrative machinery has become widely accepted. The document ***UN Millennium Project: A practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*** for example lifts public administration as one of three areas that hold the key to us overcoming the poverty trap Africa finds herself in. The other being infrastructure and human capital. We also know that these are to a large degree dependent on public administration capacity, especially in countries where government is a key player in the direct provision of social services and other development initiatives.

Public servants are at the heart of Africa's Renaissance. **We** hold the key to our own development. In order to unlock Africa's rich potential our partnerships must be formed based on mutual interests, shared commitments and binding agreements. Access to the opportunities before our people is dependant on how **we** shape the agenda of our public service, on **how we** bolster the implementation mechanisms and remove blockages, many age old, in the public sector architecture

Africa's development agenda is defined by a critical need to ensure that sound labour market reform, skills upliftment, increased intra regional trade, and improved standards of social management take place. Once, again, we see from this that our role as public servants is to be the gateway through which this development, change and Renaissance of Africa can take place. We must put in place all of the levers for our change and take responsibility for our roles, not only as the architects but also the actual builders of the pillars of change for our societies we serve. To mention but a few, we must ensure:

- Accountability to and partnership with the communities and people who rely so heavily on the work we do
- Creation and adoption of programmes that create sustainable, positive change
- Eradication of corruption which robs our countries and people from resources that should have been used for broad based development
- Creation of effective development and learning initiatives for our public service colleagues
- Removal of the structural impediments, such as unfavourable terms of trade in certain countries and regions; and then
- Forging of strong public private partnerships to drive increased investment, support and partnership

It was good to note that many of these issues were incorporated in the ***Report on the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*** which was adopted by the AU Assembly earlier this month. As with so many of the other issues, it is now for the member state governments to ratify and implement the content of the Charter.

We need to also ensure that the APRM process adequately takes this report on board as dimensions to be monitored.

With a view to the strategic priorities and programme we as Ministers for Public and Civil Service under the African Union are pursuing, Vice President and Deputy Prime Minister part of this collective, I again looked at initiatives across the key institutions, and I have to come to the conclusion that there is significant alignment on the strategic level. Even some of the international multilateral partners, notably the UN-ECA and UNDP, are trying to fit into the formulated Programmes of Action, declarations and other statements of priority. We could therefore safely assume that the problems we are experiencing with regard to the programmes as they are publicly formulated and supported is not necessarily on the so-called “policy level”. The Ministers’ agenda that continue to focus on issues of effective and ethical governance and large-scale capacity building, both for institutionally as well as individuals, as well as our particular foci on the RECs and post-conflict countries is perfectly in line with the issues underpinning the larger Africa Renaissance Agenda.

However, what we need to improve on is our alignment of processes our efforts do not necessarily carry through in other processes that take place between and within key players. In other words, we are doing the right things, but the impact thereof are limited, since the loops into certain processes are not adequately closed and connections not made in a pro active manner.

This was similarly the case with the abovementioned ***Report on the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance***. This report in its draft stages was never placed on the agenda of this Meeting/ Conference. This was most probably our own oversight. We need to ensure that we get involved in order to enthuse processes at the national level that will institutionalize the content of this Charter.

One of the processes that are supposed to help with problems like this is the issue of getting Specialized Technical Committee status for the Ministers of Public Service.

Notwithstanding Africa's achievements I have referred to, and notwithstanding the high degree of agreement on the overall goals we are striving for, I think it is necessary in all honesty to come to the conclusion that we can do better; much better! We need to do so in the interest of our people who are still excluded from benefiting from this resource rich continent on which they find themselves.

We only need to turn to a number of statements that have recently been made to different AU and NEPAD organs to realize that a massive change program is necessary within and between many of our key African institutions, because all is not so well. In 2006 in Banjul, AUC Chairperson, Prof. Alpha Konare alerted that, and I quote

“Unless this transformation [referring to the AU and AUC] is realized, our organization will continue to resist change and will remain a body incapable of taking timely action, incapable of telling its members the truth or just simply telling the truth and taking real and effective action on African realities”

While opening the 16th Summit of NEPAD Heads of State and Government, President Obassanjo reprimanded that, and I quote

“While we wish and strive for change, we have not invested the necessary will to carry our effort to fruition.”

I would argue that the challenges we experience at the continent wide level as far as implementation goes, is not dissimilar from those we repeatedly identify at the country level, and the same can be said for the regional level. These include (1) the inability and unwillingness of organizations and individuals to work together in a coordinated and integrated manner towards a shared agenda; (2) a tendency with administrations – be they commissions, secretariats, or managers and administrators – to see their political heads as an obstacle, a spoke in the wheel, adding little or no value which can be disregarded at the behest of the very professional, knowledgeable and experienced functionary; (3) too little capacity and capability all around, and where capacity and competence does exist, we overload such capacity to a level where even that is being eroded and

destroyed – we need to review capacity, both at country, regional and Africa wide level; (4) we do not deal adequately with non-performance; we skirt around it; create new structures or bend every principle in the book of good organizational design to work around problems; (5) we take many decisions at the macro-level but these are taken forward half-heartedly lower down the implementation hierarchy. Note for example our poor record with ratification of decisions at the country level; equally so we start initiatives and then do not see them through to implementation; (6) we do not assess the resource needs of programmes adequately and consequently try to do more with what a limited resource pool allows for; (7) we allow individuals to personalize fundamental organizational processes, and last, but not least (8) the shortage of dispersed and wide-scale visionary and inspired leadership, across all institutions and at all levels.

We need to dispassionately look in this meeting at areas that need improvement.

We carry the responsibility collectively for public administration and the status of it on the continent. We are a key resource to be tapped and who can validly give advice as far as it pertains to the administration of the Africa institutions our leaders have put in place on this continent in order to realize our dream of an African Renaissance.

In concluding this initial opening statement, I want to turn to the anthem of the African Union as was written by the Ethiopian poet laureate, Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin. The anthem urges us to unite to give the best we have to Africa and encourages us to make Africa the Tree of Life. We should make this recommitment today, as our colleagues in Mozambique are battling natural disaster. They are a symbol of how better administrative machineries are capable to deal with such disasters more effectively.

I thank you.