



08 OCTOBER 2004

**AFRICAN VOICES - 2ND MEETING OF THE COMMISSION FOR AFRICA,
7-8 OCTOBER**

SUMMARY NOTE

FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER, ADDIS ABABA. The Commission for Africa's second meeting came to an end today, with Commissioners promising to help summon up the international political will necessary to make a difference for Africa.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, who chaired the meeting, and delivered a keynote speech on Thursday said the Commission's report would offer 'practical action' to give Africa's children the hope of a better future.

The two-day meeting gave Commissioners the opportunity to discuss the way forward for its work and make specific conclusions to include in the final report.

The meeting was divided into a closed session and working dinner on Thursday 7 October, and a series of open debates with African civil society organisations, on Friday 8 October.

Tony Blair said:

"Armed with evidence from the Commission for Africa about what Africa needs and what has held back progress in the past, I want to turn international attention to Africa into international action to support Africa. With

that report the time for excuses will be over. The world, inside Africa and outside Africa, will know what the problems are, but also the solutions.”

Commissioners were engaged in lively debate during their four-hour long meeting, which reflected their differing perspectives.

“There was no disagreement on direction or policies,” reported Ugandan Commissioner Dr William Kalema, “but on priorities”. He gave as an example the shared desire for social protection systems in Africa – with mothers receiving child benefit, and the elderly a state pension. The challenge for the Commission would be to prioritise. There was no doubt that significant new money would be needed for social policies. Health care and education would be top priority.

The working dinner gave Commissioners further opportunity for debate, and for agreement on the shape of the final report, consultation opportunities in Africa, and priorities for action.

The discussions were divided into three key areas of:

- Opportunity, growth, resources, aid, and debt relief
- Governance, peace and security
- Human development, culture and inclusion

The following were among the many issues arising:

- Action to prevent conflict, and argued for stronger African organisations to respond to them and intervene where necessary.
- The need for effective governance in African states, particularly strengthening the civil service and the judiciary, and reducing corruption. Consideration for incentives that might be given to the best performers, for example, with additional aid.

- Girls' education as a priority area, among education initiatives at all levels. Information and communications technology should be used to greater effect in schooling. In health, centres of excellence in training and research into communicable diseases would be expensive, but invaluable.
- The need to take account of African culture, and the significant cultural differences throughout the continent. Africa also needed to be given a greater voice in global institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF, to make sure that aid is designed in the most effective way.
- The discussion on opportunity and growth looked at the need for greater private investment to generate economic growth; fair trade, enabling Africa to protect its infant industries; increased agricultural performance and the development of home markets for produce; and the need to provide incentives to stem the brain drain of skilled Africans to the west.
- The discussion on aid and debt relief focused on the need for greater aid volumes, a reappraisal of the current rules relating to debt relief, and the move away from loans to grants.

Many other areas were discussed. The Commissioners agreed to publish the ideas emerging from their work in progress as a draft paper on the Commission website, and used as the basis for consultation within Africa at a series of regional workshops over the next few months. The regional workshops and other consultation initiatives across the G8 and with a wide variety of stakeholders, including business, civil society and others, designed to test the Commissioners' ideas and collect new ones. Work on drafting the Commissioners' report would begin in early 2005 with a target for publication at the end of March, in good time before the Commissioners present their work to the G8 Summit.

The second day of the meeting was given over to open debate with African civil society organisations. The debate was divided into three sessions, covering the same areas as the closed Commission meeting and discussing many of the points that had been raised in that meeting.

The meetings were well attended, and reflected participants' hopes for the Commission, as well as their misgivings. A full note of these discussions will be posted on the Commission website. Participants were also encouraged to make further contributions to the Commission's ongoing consultation process.

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