

Statement by Hon. Minister Gayan on Africa - 29 Jan. 2002

Allow me at the outset to express, on behalf of my country, our deepest grief and sympathy over the tragedies that the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have endured in the aftermath of the volcanic eruption in Goma. Our sympathy and condolences also go to the Government and the people of Nigeria over the huge loss of lives caused by the bomb explosions of a military arms depot in Lagos.

We highly appreciate the presence of those attending this special meeting on Africa and for the quality and content of their contributions. I would like to extend a special and very warm welcome to the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Mr. Amara Essy, whose presence here will hopefully develop into a permanent feature for consultation between the Security Council and the African Union in the days to come.

Individually African countries have occupied and will continue to occupy the time and attention of the Security Council. This meeting, however, is a unique opportunity for the Council to address the issues of the continent as a package. What is of interest to us in these consultations is not the past, but what the future holds for Africa, a continent abundant in natural and mineral resources and yet desperately awaiting the attention and firm commitment and support of the international community in the field of political, economic and technological development.

Africa as a whole has unanimously condemned the terrorist attacks of 11 September, and we are committed to taking all measures to eradicate not only the terrorists, but also the sources of terrorism. With the war against terror being won and with Afghanistan on the road to reconstruction, we consider, however, that the time has come to reactivate the spotlight on Africa.

It is important to know that Africa is ready to undo the errors of the past and to shed the image of doom and gloom, which unfortunately keeps being projected throughout the world. The new

breed of African leaders has the determination and the political courage to confront the truth and reality, however painful and harsh they may be.

We are encouraged by the efforts of the international community to address the root causes of conflicts in Africa, as identified in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. We also note, however, that the provisions of Security Council resolutions 1170 (1998) and 1197 (1998) are yet to be implemented. We therefore propose that an ad hoc working group composed of Council members be set up to look into the implementation aspects, as well as the enhancement of cooperation and coordination between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

We are concerned by the linkages of conflicts with the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, with the illegal exploitation of natural resources and with the lack of success of sanctions regimes. We believe that the time has come for finalizing the review process on the sanctions regimes. In spite of the sanctions against it, UNITA still has the capability of carrying out terrorist acts, causing the deaths of hundreds of civilians. But at the same time, it is important that the collateral effects of sanctions on civilian populations be seriously studied.

Before I go further, allow me to say that we are comforted by the interest that the G-8 has shown in addressing the immense problems that afflict Africa. While we welcome the attention, we wish to make it absolutely clear that Africa has undertaken major reassessments of an infinite variety of issues, with the result that a political transformation of the highest order is now in place. We are confident that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated and that the blueprint, as set out in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), will not be departed from.

Unfortunately, the boundless optimism that accompanied the independence of African countries is matched only by the scale of the frustration of that optimism. Many African heroes who fought for

liberation rapidly succumbed to the temptations of lifelong presidencies, destroying in the process all that remained of a multiparty political system. From 1960 to date, more than 80 coups, 24 political assassinations and about 100 attempted coups are the legacy of our continent. Coups d'état or assassinations became the only mode of changing Governments in many countries. That, unfortunately, became the recipe for instability, the death of democracy and the absence of any semblance of good governance. Africa has paid and is still paying an intolerable price for these manmade disasters. The unlimited power of the heads of State who became Presidents for life undermined the structure of the State, and the institutions crumbled.

Whether the causes of conflicts are internal or external, the truth remains that more than 7 million Africans have perished in 32 wars, and we have nearly 10 million refugees and internally displaced persons in post-colonial Africa. This situation cannot endure, as this was not the dream of the founding fathers of the OAU. Hopefully, quite a number of conflicts are being resolved. The inter-Congolese dialogue is now scheduled to take place on 25 February 2002 at Sun City in South Africa, and the implementation of the Framework Agreement in the Comoros with elections in April also illustrates that patience is critical in the search for the resolution of conflicts. In West Africa, as many other speakers have pointed out, the improvement is visible, and peer pressure seems to be effective.

The OAU has utilized its Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution with a fair degree of efficacy. The management of conflicts has taken various forms, and the OAU has adopted innovative mechanisms that have been more or less successful.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has a Protocol on Peace, Security and Defence, which has an organ to deal with conflicts in the sub-region. SADC is determined to avoid conflicts in the region and to use the organ as an instrument for this purpose. We believe that whatever bad or negative happens in one Member State impacts adversely on all the other Members. In this respect, it is the duty of every Member to protect the region from tension and conflicts.

With regard to the conflict in the Great Lakes region, SADC invited Uganda and Rwanda to a recent Summit meeting in Blantyre, although these two States are not members of SADC. Getting all the parties directly involved in the conflict around a table greatly help, in our view, in confidence-building and instilling an element of trust among the concerned parties.

The urgent establishment of an effective and workable early warning system is of paramount importance with regard to conflict prevention. Dealing with a full-blown conflict consumes too many resources, which we in Africa can ill afford. We have in Africa a reservoir of eminent leaders and former heads of State who can be entrusted with the task of surveying the continent and detecting signs of potential tension. No conflict or war gets started overnight. It should be possible to intervene before it is too late.

The diagnosis is clear and unchallenged. Other speakers have catalogued the appalling statistics, and I do not propose to travel over the same ground. Africa is trapped: poverty, disease, conflicts, HIV/AIDS and a multiplicity of other problems demonstrate the magnitude of the task that we face in Africa. The population picture will be significantly altered as a result of HIV/AIDS, with additional dangers to regional peace and security.

The most significant development in recent African history was the decision taken by the OAU at the 1998 Algiers Summit to deny recognition to any Government which came to power through unconstitutional means. That concept is now an integral part of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. The message is unambiguous and unchallengeable. That is not to say that the provision is by itself sufficient to guarantee transparency in the peaceful transfer of power through free and fair elections, but it does deal a terminator blow to coups d'état, whose impact on the present state of affairs in Africa has yet to be studied.

The setting up of a special war crimes court in Sierra Leone is significant for two reasons. First, it provides the victims of atrocities with the prospect of justice and the certainty of punishment for the offenders, irrespective of status or any other consideration; and

secondly, it sends a message that crimes will not be forgotten and that the era of impunity has come to an end.

Our experience in Africa has shown that heads of State cling to power because of the fear of what an incoming Government could exact from them by way of retribution or vengeance. In such circumstances they are prepared to go to any length to remain in power. This problem must be addressed in a dispassionate and objective manner; we consider that Africa is mature enough to guarantee any outgoing head of State a minimum of personal security as well as adequate resources to lead his life in a dignified manner.

We have embarked on a new paradigm for Africa. Elections which are free and fair are regularly held; Governments that lost elections have transferred power peacefully; institutions are being revitalized; an independent and corruption-free judiciary and anticorruption tribunals and bodies are being set up all over the continent; the rule of law is gaining at the expense of presidential fiat; the economy is being liberalized; the challenges of globalization are being appraised realistically; the emergence of civil society and human rights groups, free media, global communications and gender programmes; an enhanced role for the private sector; and the involvement of all State and non-State actors in the development process: that is news coming out of Africa every day.

We do not accept that the destiny of Africa is poverty and despair. We are determined to escape that cycle. We have a vision of an Africa which is rid of conflicts and which is engaged in reconstruction — not only of bridges and infrastructure but also of a new mindset by which we will not continue to view the rest of the world as the source of our difficulties. We must claim ownership of our difficulties so that we can also claim ownership of our successes. We cannot do it on our own. We need assistance and support. There is a new brand of leadership in Africa which means what it says. The New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Constitutive Act of the African Union contain commitments and targets.

We urge the Security Council to be seized of the concerns of Africa and to ensure that follow-up action pursuant to its resolutions is taken in time. Here, we welcome the statement made this morning by Baroness Amos of the United Kingdom, that Africa would be made the focus of the United Kingdom presidency next July.