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«INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON  
CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT»

OPENING REMARKS  
BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU  
H.E. SALIM AHMED SALIM

WORLD BANK

Washington D.C., 2 April, 1992.



Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to express my pleasure to be here with you today, to participate in this important international conference. I would like to thank our host, Mr. Edward Jaycox, Vice President for Africa at The World Bank, and convey my personal appreciation to the organizer of this encounter, Mr. Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bank's Africa Technical Department, for the invitation that he kindly extended to me to open this meeting.

It is gratifying to see so many distinguished personalities convening to reflect on the cultural dimension of development: a long-neglected aspect of the development challenge. The Organization of African Unity, the embodiment of so much of Africa's ideas and aspirations, takes pride in seeing so many distinguished Africans joining the international community in addressing this issue.

I am particularly pleased to be present at the conference because it is dedicated to Africa. It is evident that, at a time when the world is going through profound change, Africa cannot afford to remain on the fringes of such fundamental transformation without compounding the state of marginalization in which it already finds itself. Our continent has to effectively prepare its entry into the twenty-first century and occupy the position to which it is rightfully entitled. It does have the resources. It also does have the will! However, Africa needs the cooperation, understanding, and support of the international community at large and of the developed countries in particular to overcome its present economic difficulties and foster its development in keeping with its own identity and specificity. This is why the exchange of views that you will engage in today on culture and development, under the auspices of your prestigious institutions, is of relevance to the future of our continent.

In 1968 UNESCO proclaimed that "If man is at the origin of development, if he is the agent and beneficiary thereof, he should, above all, be considered as the justification and finality of development." UNESCO further declared that development must be viewed as a whole and economic and social development as an all-encompassing undertaking to which education information and cultural progress provide essential inputs.

Since then, growing importance has been accorded to the cultural dimension of development. This was largely due to the realization that a people does not fully commit itself to a development undertaking unless that undertaking corresponds to its deeply felt needs. In other words people should be in a position to derive the means and motivation for their development from their own cultural roots. It should be underlined in this regard that even though economic growth is a fundamental determinant of development, it would not be proper to consider it as its ultimate objective. Indeed, to view development simply in terms of the linear increase in national income with the attendant capital accumulation, industrialization, urban expansion, technological progress, and integration within the world market would not fully reflect the real objectives of a human-centered development. Development is, therefore, a global undertaking with multiple dimensions—economic, social, and cultural—that influence one another. Indeed, each of these developmental factors is, on its own, multi-dimensional. Education, for instance, which involves the transmission of knowledge and values, is definitely a cultural process. It is equally an economic process in that, when seen from the labor market angle, it is an investment. There is also a direct relationship between culture and education, and democracy, in that it is through culture and education that democratic values are inculcated in society and sustained within it.



Mr. Chairman,

An exciting, healthy, although at times admittedly tumultuous, debate on democratization is now going on in our continent. We in Africa are most interested in this debate on democratization, coming as it does at a time when our continent is undergoing profound sociopolitical changes. Our interest is made more profound by the nature and structures of our countries. Africa is made up of states, which are young, fragile, and exist in enormous cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Since these changes are inevitable and will have to be undertaken within this diversity, our interest is to see that these changes take place in an atmosphere of peace and concord. In my view the best guarantee for the peaceful transition we seek lies in building solid foundations to nurture and sustain democratic systems in Africa. This is why it is my firm belief that greater attention should be directed at building democratic institutions and promoting a culture of tolerance that can effectively underwrite the democratic systems that we want strengthened and the form that these democratic systems take in Africa. Needless to say, the pace of change will have to be determined by the specific conditions and needs of each country and of each society.

Mr. Chairman,

The peaceful management of change in Africa is one of the major challenges facing our continent today. This imperative assumes greater urgency especially now when, along with the agitation for greater democracy, our continent is going through an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions that threatens to raise the spectre of chaos and confusion. To be able to manage the change, Africa will need enormous resources, which, on its own, it could be difficult to marshal. It will, therefore, be necessary for the international community to assist

Africa in the management of the transition, particularly by providing added resources. For, indeed, the process of greater democratization in our continent cannot fully take root if it is not, in the final analysis, linked to the upliftment of the conditions of our people. Poverty breeds anarchy and is inimical to the development of democracy.

This assistance is all the more necessary when seen against the fact that the efforts made by African countries towards economic recovery and development have not met with a commensurate response from the developed world. Our continent continues to wallow in acute economic difficulties that are compounded by a particularly hostile international economic environment that is increasingly becoming less and less accommodative to the interests of the developing countries, particularly those of Africa. The efforts of most African countries continue to be hamstrung by the huge debt burden, unfavorable terms of trade, and reverse resource flows. These factors have combined to wreak havoc to the economy of the continent. But also, we are most concerned over the diversion of attention and resources from Africa to other regions of the world. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, I have no doubt that these issues will be raised in the course of your deliberations. I am also confident that your gathering will not fail to stress that development must take a global approach and that the marginalization of Africa will not serve the interests of the African peoples. It will also not serve the interests of the international community at large.

Mr. Chairman,

Each society has its own distinctive system of values that constitute an important part of its culture. A society or community needs to harness and maximize the resourcefulness of its culture in a dynamic manner to develop harmoniously.

It is important, however, to stress that we live in an interdependent world within which each society or culture must strive to keep pace with scientific and technological progress. The challenge lies in determining the ways and means of fostering a synergistic development between science and technology, on the one hand, and cultural values, on the other. Technology does have cultural implications, and, when introducing new technology, due consideration should accordingly be given to the cultural values inherent in a particular society. We are all too familiar with development projects that have failed because they were superimposed on a cultural environment that was not conducive and therefore could not enlist the support of the people concerned.

The debate on the compatibility between cultural values and technological development is also directly linked to the issue of the compatibility between traditional and modern values. Some advocates of the latter contend that cultural values and traditions are obstacles to modernization. Rather, experiences in development, as in the case of Japan, clearly demonstrate that traditional cultural values and modernism are compatible and that a people can, certainly, achieve socioeconomic development in harmony with their beliefs and cultural values. Africa is proud of its rich and varied cultural heritage. Whether it be in the field of painting and sculpture, music and dance, literature or archeology, African culture is universally acknowledged and appreciated. This is, indeed, a reflection of the creative genius of the people of Africa; it is also Africa's contribution to universal culture and civilization. This Africa was able to do notwithstanding the oppression and subjugation to which its culture and traditions were subjected under colonialism.

Africa is as committed to modernity as it is to its cultural heritage and values. It can therefore ill-afford to replace its own cultural values by some so-called world culture to whose



elaboration Africa was not given opportunity to contribute. Is it wise or indeed advisable for the world to share one and the same culture? Would a uniform culture not stifle creativity and genius and thus hinder human progress? Rather I choose to believe that it is possible to aim at a world within which common values can be shared while specific cultures develop and in which the specific and the universal can merge and be mutually strengthening and enriching.

Mr. Chairman,

The economic reforms undertaken in developing countries, and more specifically in Africa, very often on the advice of the donors, have to be viewed in light of this linkage between culture and development. These structural reforms, which are devised to ensure greater economic profitability and efficiency and a more effective integration of the economies of the developing countries into the world economy as well as a greater opening to trade and commerce, often generate social and cultural upheavals with the attendant destabilizing effect on the political situation in the countries concerned. In view of the volume of economic assistance that it provides and the influence that it wields in the international monetary and financial system, The World Bank has a primary role to play in promoting policies that emphasize long-term growth and that situate the people at the center of the development process.

I am happy to note that, over the years, The World Bank has progressively pursued the human resources development concept based on the enhancement of human resources with a view to fostering growth and sustaining the campaign against poverty. The campaign against poverty and development assistance are, indeed, among the major challenges facing the international community. The human resources development approach, which is increasingly



shared within the international community, seems, in my view, to be the most appropriate means of ensuring that the human resources available in Africa are liberated and used for development purposes.

Mr. Chairman,

The fact that The World Bank is organizing an International Conference on Culture and Development with special focus on Africa must be seen within the context of the Bank's commitment to this new approach to development. The Bank's growing interest in human resources development in the world was clearly demonstrated in its active participation at the Jomtien World Conference devoted to education for all. This was a reaffirmation of the primacy of education in development. In addition the Bank associated itself recently with UNESCO and other national and multilateral development institutions and agencies at a meeting organized in Paris, from 16 to 18 September last year, to deliberate on the issue of "The Cultural Dimension of Development." The meeting acknowledged the failure of most development strategies adopted over the last three decades due to the very narrow concept of development that did not take into account the diversity of cultures and societies in the world. The meeting, accordingly, recommended that UNESCO design and promote a new approach to problems of development based on an acknowledgement of the fact that development is rooted in sociocultural realities.

I would like to welcome this new approach and express the hope that this International Conference will pave the way towards a wider and more encompassing concept of development in the world. I also wish to pay tribute to The World Bank and to all the other national and multilateral institutions for their respective contributions to development in the world at large and, more specifically, in Africa. I would like to urge them to continue with their efforts so

that, together, we can build a better world in which peace and prosperity will be shared.

The subject of this conference does underscore a point that is sometimes forgotten in debates on culture and development. Africa stands at a political, social, economic, and cultural crossroads, caught as it were between the values of the Western liberal democratic tradition and its own traditional democratic and cultural values. The task for Africa, therefore, is to synthesize these values and ensure a more humane, balanced, and equitable process of development.

Thank you for your attention.