

Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Africa Partnership Forum in Berlin on 22 May 2007

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Prime Minister Rasmussen,
President Mogae,
Foreign Minister Akufu-Addo,
Professor Mucavele,
Minister Tornaes,
Minister Wieczorek-Zeul,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here today in Berlin to open the African Partnership Forum with the Danish Prime Minister, my colleague in the European Union, and the Ghanaian Foreign Minister, representing the Chairmanship of the African Union. Minister Akufu-Addo, please pass on our sincere regards to President Kufuor, whom, of course, we will be meeting in Heiligen-damm. We are looking forward to his visit to Germany.

Of course, I am particularly pleased to see that so many of you have come here today because in this way you are underlining the importance of the African Partnership Forum in promoting an open dialogue based, as its name suggests, on partnership. This forum always provides a welcome opportunity for bringing a detailed picture of Africa to the public's attention. After all, the general public's perception of Africa – in Germany, at least – is one which is dominated almost exclusively by images and reports of crises and conflicts. I believe it is very important to make it clear that this is not a true reflection of the reality.

On closer examination, there are other facets to this reality: for several years now, there have been fewer conflicts in Africa, there have been more democratic elections, and power has changed hands peacefully more often. Nor is it widely known that economic growth in Africa is, on average, high – at over 5% – and that there is economic growth – and this is something which I feel is very important – not just in countries which are rich in raw materials, but also in other countries. There are also hopeful signs in the fight against HIV/AIDS in some countries. There are more children with access to education. All of this is happening, but I do not wish to sweep the existing problems under the carpet. And so I believe that, after years of stagnation, Africa may now have a chance to share in sustainable development and for poverty to be reduced.

Many may wish to dismiss this as utopian, perhaps because of the 300 million people still living in poverty in Africa. But I would counter this by taking Europe as an example. For centuries, Europe was also a continent plagued by war and crisis. Not many would have believed it possible that we would one day be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome in the European Union – as we did recently – or that we would be able to say "These have been years of peace." Incidentally, the period since World War II has now been the longest period of peace in Europe's history. People living in Europe can today look towards a future in peace and freedom. Together with their children, they can lead self-determined lives in dignity. So why should something which was possible in Europe not also be possible for Africa?

How did it become possible in Europe? I believe it became possible because the nation states realized that they could advance their own interests best if they also understood the interests of the other nation states and were able to find a fair compromise between these interests. Looking at the bigger picture did in fact strengthen, and not weaken, their own interests. That is why, at the start of our EU Presidency, I said in the European Parliament that when we ask about Europe's soul, then this soul has a lot to do with our having learnt to be tolerant and to

respect others, to respect their dignity and to understand that all this is an enrichment of our own lives.

I believe that this is also possible in Africa. I believe that people can find the strength to achieve this and that we Europeans, in light of our history as a whole, also have a very special responsibility towards the African continent, not least because it is our neighbouring continent. That is why it is our duty to make this vision, your vision, a reality in Africa – and not with an air of condescension but rather in a spirit of partnership, as the name of the African Partnership Forum implies. This is borne out by the policies pursued by the Federal Government and by Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul in particular, who as Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (you will note that the ministry is no longer "for Development Aid" but "for Development", which is an expression of the fact that Africa has a chance) has made an out-standing contribution here.

We have come to realize that more and more conflicts in the world can only be solved globally – whether it be the issues surrounding energy supplies or climate change, the issues of migration and civil wars, the fight against terrorism or pandemics to which none of us can turn a blind eye. Of course, we also know that the gap resulting from economic growth on one continent and poverty on the other can give rise to problems that no one can ignore. Therefore I believe that we should talk to each other to identify the steps that have to be taken.

I believe that the founding of the African Union was a very important historical step and that it is also in the European Union's interests – and I say this as President of the Council – to do everything it can to foster the skills, possibilities and strengths of this African Union and to help it on its future path. I would also like to mention the NEPAD reform programme, which has also been an important step in allowing as many countries as possible to benefit from sound development.

When I say this, I am of course also saying that these visions must not distort our view of the reality. It is clear that the processes are difficult ones. Looking at the elections in Nigeria a few days ago, it is encouraging to see that, for the first time, there has been an "electoral" transfer of power in Nigeria. However, there are also serious shortcomings, and much remains to be done.

Of course – and I thank you, Foreign Minister, for addressing this openly – we must not keep quiet about the problems that exist in some countries. We urgently call on the Sudanese Government to discharge its duty towards its citizens and to enable them to live dignified lives. A transition from the African Union mission to a joint African Union/United Nations mission must now, at last, be made. This is an urgent priority. We will join together with you to do everything we can to finally make this step possible. Perhaps not every day counts for those who are still deciding whether they want this transition. But for those who may have to flee their homes, who are threatened with displacement, terrible hardship and death, each day which passes is another day lost for ever. We should never forget that.

We will do our utmost to move the reconciliation process in Somalia forward. We are also deeply concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. Intimidation of political opponents, harassment of the independent press, threats against farmers and the nationwide destruction of poor settlements – none of this can be justified in any way. The policies of President Mugabe are unacceptable. I therefore appeal also to the political decision-makers in the States neighbouring Zimbabwe: Wield your influence to the benefit of the people in Zimbabwe.

In the Constitutive Act of the African Union, AU members affirmed their commitment to democracy and the rule of law. This partnership also forms the basis for the partnership between the G8 countries and Africa. And so it is a very good thing that, since its 1999 Summit in Cologne, the G8, whose Presidency Germany holds once again this year, has been working with its African partners to intensify this reform partnership. Today's African Partnership Forum,

which brings together Africa's most important bilateral and multilateral partners, also serves this aim. We hope that these regular, intense consultations will continue to be productive.

Apart from a willingness to assume ownership, of course, mutual accountability and reliability are also crucial to a good partnership. Consequently, we must honour the commitments which both sides have entered into.

It has to be said that we live in an era where goals have been set for practically everything: the Millennium Development Goals have been agreed, development aid quotas have been approved. The task now for our generation of politicians is to realize these goals, a task which is certainly not easier than setting the goals was. We know that our dependability and credibility are at stake. Therefore, we will do everything we can to realize these goals. They are demanding goals, but we know the damage that can be caused if we do not meet them. That is why we will work hard to attain them.

But these goals are also demanding right now, in 2007. We have come to realize that economic growth provides us with the best possibilities for keeping our commitments to others and for gaining acceptance within our own countries. Therefore, domestic reforms for a dynamic Europe and aid for Africa are two sides of the same coin.

Of course, it is every bit as important not just to make money and assistance available but also to see to it that this money is used to the benefit of the people in Africa. We chose our G8 motto "Growth and Responsibility" to reflect this. Responsibility also means fostering good governance, setting up effective mechanisms for maintaining peace and taking effective action against infectious diseases. In other words, we want Africa to share in the resources and opportunities of globalization. But we also want this to happen in an efficient way. There is no point in carrying out separate independent projects whose ultimate outcome is neutralized by inefficient governance. Rather, we must see to it that institutions and projects are tailored to each other so that the desired outcome is achieved.

In preparation for this year's G8 Summit, we have had many meetings with non-governmental organizations and economic players. An incredible number of young people in Germany are committed to helping Africa. They feel it is important that they are told about the success that their hard work has brought about, and at the same time that they are shown what still has to be done.

Ladies and gentlemen, under the Portuguese Presidency, the EU will be holding a summit with the countries of Africa for the first time in years. I have always championed this. I am very grateful to the Portuguese Presidency for making it a reality. We should also use this summit, which will take place at the end of the year, to talk about the opportunities and short-comings of our cooperation, in order to improve and advance it.

We want a positive message for Africa to come out of the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm. We will also meet with the NEPAD founding States as representatives of Africa, who should also make their voice heard there. We simply want to make it clear that this continent, like our own development, is important to us. I am sure that this African Partnership Forum will once again lend fresh impetus to the talks in Heiligendamm.

I trust that your talks will be successful. Don't shy away from addressing all of the facts openly. Doing so in a spirit of partnership and friendship is the best way of finding solutions.

Many thanks – I hope your talks are constructive.