



Statement

By

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United Nations General Assembly

On the Theme:

***“Effective responses to global crises: strengthening
multilateralism and dialogue among civilizations for
international peace, security and development”***

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President of the General Assembly,
Secretary General of the United Nations,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is said in the Holy Bible, in the Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 1, verses 2-3, that it was an eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea on Canaan's border; yet it took the Israelites 40 years to get beyond it.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 8, verse 2, it also says: *And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.*

Similarly, Africa, especially Black Africa, has been wandering in the 'desert' of underdevelopment for much of the 40 years following independence.

As it says, in the Common Prayer Book, one cannot help to wonder whether it was because we had “*left undone those things which we ought to have done;*” and we did “*those things which we ought not to have done;*” and there was “*no truth in us*”. The Asian countries (South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, India, etc.), on the other hand, did not similarly wander in the desert of ‘underdevelopment’; this is not to mention the People’s Republic of China.

Fortunately, in the last 15-20 years, Africans have also got the grasp of the development compass. We have started doing what we had *left undone* for a long time and the “truth” is now beginning to be “seen in us”.

Uganda’s economy has grown at the rate of 6.5 per cent per annum for the last 23 years. During the last Financial Year (2008/2009), Uganda’s rate of growth was 7 per cent in spite of the global recession which affected us also. In this Financial Year (2009/2010), our rate of growth will be in excess of 7

per cent. In 2007/2008 Financial Year, our rate of growth was 9.8 per cent before adjusting for inflation.

We achieved reasonable rates of growth the fact that we have not yet dealt with the three infrastructural elements decisively notwithstanding. The three strategic infrastructure elements I am referring to are: **electricity, roads and railways**. While we have achieved peace, macro-economic stability, education for all, some aspects of health for all, economic integration in the region, market access internationally, democratization and scientific research we have been slow on these three: **electrification, roads and railways**. This slowness was on account of depending on foreign funding which tends to be frivolous and erratic.

We depended on foreign funding because our tax collections were very low initially. Our tax collections have now grown in tandem with the growth of the economy already mentioned.

Uganda is, therefore, now able to fund the road, rail and electricity projects on its own although we, of course, welcome foreign investment. We can no longer, however, be held at ransom by foreign funding for these vital foundational infrastructure elements. It is amazing and, indeed, shameful to see the low levels of electrification in Africa. In the USA, the kWh per capita is 14,124. In Africa, it is only 547 kWh per capita. Some of the African countries have as low as 9 kWh per capita. How, then, could we expect growth and transformation in such a situation?

The whole of Africa needs to wake up on this issue and cooperate to find a solution.

The same goes for the high transport costs on account of poor roads and poor or non-existent railways. In China, US\$12 is needed to transport a tonne of cargo between Beijing and Shanghai by rail. In East Africa, transporting the same cargo over a comparable distance would require US\$65. We are

aware of these bottlenecks and we are dealing with them one by one.

There are two other bottlenecks that we so often talk about:

- exporting raw materials; and
- the lack of transforming subsistence and traditional agriculture into modernized agriculture.

The haemorrhage of exporting raw materials, for which we get 10 per cent of the final processed product, has been recognized by many of us as the *modern slavery*.

In Uganda we are also transforming traditional subsistence agriculture into modern agriculture as already mentioned. This involves using improved seeds, fertilizers, tractors, irrigation, improved breeding stock and improved agro-practices. However, we know that we cannot do all these sustainably if we continue to neglect the environment.

Therefore, our development and transformation manifesto and action plan in Uganda entail the following:

- Peace;
- Democracy;
- Education for all;
- Health for all;
- Macro-economic stability and economic liberalization;
- Electricity generation and distribution to banish the very low levels of kWh per capita;
- Modernizing the roads;
- Rebuilding and modernizing the railways;
- Commercializing and modernizing agriculture away from the traditional subsistence farming;
- Value-addition to our agricultural and mineral products instead of just exporting raw materials – this will include petroleum and gas;
- Regional integration to widen the markets as well as accessing international markets;
- Environmental protection;

- Scientific research – we are already supporting a number of innovation researches by Ugandan scientists.

Ugandans and other Africans in our region who have been chronically under-consuming in the past have now helped our economy to stay afloat, in spite of the global recession because, now, they have greater capacity to purchase what we produce.

Their consumption is going up; hence supporting our regionally-oriented industries.

We think that, at last, we have graduated from *wandering in the desert* of under-development and we are now marching towards socio-economic transformation. We are finally doing that which we *ought to have done and the truth, this time, is with us*. The phase of what Rene' Dumont called “a false start” in Uganda, is over. We are entering into the phase of **growth** and **transformation**. Therefore, we believe, our economy will soon take off.

In conclusion, therefore, Uganda's response to the global crisis has been fair because of the regional trade. It would have been fairer if we had already dealt with the three infrastructural elements I have already talked about: **roads, electricity and railways.**

This would have enabled us to lower the costs of doing business in Uganda and, therefore, raise profitability of the enterprises. Africa has got great potential for growth that is not tapped. The current global crisis was caused by certain laxities in the management of some of the economies of the world. Those laxities need to be rectified through multi-lateral action. We need to stop money laundering and strengthen regulation. Multi-lateral action would also be welcome in unlocking the dormant potential of Africa.

In the case of Uganda and many of the African countries we have a double challenge: the first challenge is the **struggle to transform our economies from their pre-industrial state to**

modern state; the second challenge is to cope with the problems caused by others such as the present global financial crisis and the environmental degradation.

There are, however, a few questions that keep coming into my mind: Is the present profligacy of some of the developed countries sustainable if we all join in that lifestyle? Or was it only possible when a tiny minority of humanity was enjoying affluence? Is there need for a more rationalized modern lifestyle?

The need for dialogue among civilizations is long overdue. That dialogue could help us deal with some of the headaches and dilemmas confronted by humanity.

I thank you for listening to me.