



Commission on Effective Development Cooperation with Africa

Chairman's introduction

The Danish Prime Minister, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, gave the following speech at the first meeting of the Africa Commission

Copenhagen 16 April 2008

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Commissioners;

Please let me welcome you to Copenhagen and to the Commission for Effective Development Cooperation with Africa. I am pleased that you have accepted to join the Commission!

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Africa is close to my heart. I wish to engage wholeheartedly in cooperating with you on bringing change to Africa.

The African people have made a special impression on me. Especially the young people with their hope, energy and creativity. And the tough circumstances and the incredible achievements, which have been made in relatively short time.

I hope that to see an Africa where freedom, democracy, peace and development prevail. This will not happen over night. But the many positive developments tell me that it is not only possible - it is within reach.

Africa still faces significant challenges. The United Nations Millennium Development Goal on poverty reduction will not be reached in Africa as a whole, only in some countries. The same applies to many of the other Millennium goals. We must keep Africa on the international agenda and show the world that our efforts are worthwhile.

When I look around and listen to advice from the many voices, there is one that is repeated again and again: Young people and employment. And another which is a key driver: Economic Growth.

First on Youth and employment.

The new generation is the future. They represent an enormous resource and must be given a chance to live out the dreams that they have for themselves, their families, their country and their continent.

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With the Africa Commission we can explore how international development cooperation can best support them in realizing their dreams. By focusing on youth and employment, we aim to arrive at realistic and specific recommendations. I hope you will agree with me that it is the right Commission at the right time and with the right focus.

I can assure you that Denmark will lead the way and let the recommendations of this Commission inspire our policies towards Africa. Denmark has a long tradition for engaging in development cooperation. And we will increase the official development assistance over the coming years. Our aim is that 2/3 of our bilateral assistance will be directed to Africa.

We will also work actively to promote the recommendations in various international fora, notably the European Union.

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What are then the challenges regarding youth and employment? About 15 million young people leave primary school every year in Africa. The majority do not have access to further education or decent jobs. Young girls face particular challenges. Youth unemployment is high and productivity is generally low.

African governments have made huge progress in basic education with net enrolment rates of 70 per cent in 2005. This is remarkable. However, we have to focus more on quality and completion rates. There is also a need for more secondary and tertiary education. And in particular there is a need for developing technical and vocational education and training at a larger scale. I believe that the Commission should consider how the international development cooperation can best support progress in these areas.

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A second area is economic growth. High economic growth will help in two ways. It will increase demand for labour. It will also increase tax revenues and private sources for investments in education.

Economic growth has picked up in Africa - about 6 per cent last year. Some countries are growing even more. High oil and commodity prices are driving some of this growth. Policies and governance have also improved in many places. But there are severe challenges as well: Rising food prices and reliance on for example oil.

No matter how we respond to the challenges, there is no doubt that a key element will be high and sustained economic growth that benefits all.

The Commission should consider how the international community can be more supportive of private sector development and economic growth:

- Should there be more support for sector initiatives, for example agriculture value chains – support to all steps from the cultivation to production to marketing?
- Should there be more focus on linking research and private sector?
- Should there be more support directly to the private sector?
- Should there be more focus on the informal economy?
- And how do we tackle corruption effectively and make sure that the many initiatives within good governance support the creation of economic growth?

I look forward to hearing your views on the challenges at hand and the possibilities for taking them on.

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Our main task today is to discuss how we can fulfil our ambitions of supporting the young in Africa and help ensure employment opportunities.

It is important for me to underline that there are no foregone conclusions. I sincerely wish for our discussions to be open and broad and to stimulate thinking ‘out of the box’.

Together we represent almost all the major stakeholders in the international development cooperation with Africa. From African Governments to NGO’s. From international donor agencies to experts. We have different perspectives, but our aim is the same: To create a better future for the millions of young people in Africa.

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I have been looking forward to launching the Commission. And I look very much forward to the discussions we will have today and throughout the coming year. The discussion papers, which were circulated last week, are meant to be an inspiration to you and a source of data. We can use them as a point of departure. But my main interest is to hear your take on the challenge and how we can make a difference through our work.

As you know there will be three main meetings of the Commission:

1. Today’s meeting, where we will constitute the Commission and agree on Commission conclusions and an action plan for our future work
2. We will then have a meeting in November this year, which I expect will take place in Addis Ababa. At this meeting we will have a first draft of the Commission report, which we can discuss in depth.
3. The last and final meeting will take place here in Copenhagen at approximately this time next year. At this meeting we will launch the Commission report and consider ways of supporting the implementation of the recommendations.

But obviously the work is not done with these three meetings!

Between the first and the second meeting, we intend to organise a series of thematic conferences in Africa. The immediate aim of these workshops is to provide input for the Commission meetings and to our report. More importantly however, the conferences will ensure broader engagement in Africa in the work of the Commission. It is my hope that you will be able to participate in some of them together with representatives of civil society, local NGOs, and regional and international organizations. The Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Ms. Tørnæs, will host two of these events.

I suggest the following themes of the conferences:

- ‘The African Youth and Employment’
- ‘The Educational Challenge’
- ‘Creating Economic Growth’
- ‘Climate Change’ and;
- ‘Women and Employment in Africa’.

In addition to the conferences, we will organise a number of side-events. For instance a youth forum, an NGO forum and a private sector forum.

It is my hope that you all will engage actively in the work ahead of us. For example by co-chairing thematic conferences. Another possibility is to provide input in the form of papers or the like. All contributions will be highly welcomed. Already now, I wish to encourage you to consider how we can most significantly call attention to the Commissions’ report when it is launched next year.

And now, honored Commissioners, I will let you return to your lunch. But I am afraid only for a brief moment. There is a lot of work to be done.

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