

Talking Points for President Pedro Pires

AIS Launch, National Assembly, Praia, Cabo Verde

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Protocol/Greetings

- Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to you all for your present here today. Members of the Government, President Donald Kaberuka, and honored guests welcome and thank you for joining us today.

Introduction

- For over half a century now, I have been concerned and engaged on the issue of development. At first, my focus was on ensuring independence and self determination for my country and on the African continent.
- But for many including myself it was clear early on that without economic development, self determination and political independence made little sense.
- As such, for many post-independence leaders in Africa, the initial efforts were centered on providing education and health care, building infrastructure, and economic development through industrialization. These were the top agenda. And, in many cases, African countries realized major gains in socioeconomic indicators.
- However, many also adopted prevailing ideologies which were detriment to development while in many situations

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proxy wars by the then superpowers were fought in many African countries, including military coups and counter coups. These significantly retarded the development process.

- For us in Cape Verde, we were lucky as we avoided many of the mistakes and, despite the initial conditions which weighed heavily against us, we have managed to make consistent progress since independence.
- The good thing today is that the world and Africa has changed, in many ways for the better. Today, Africa is no longer awash with civil wars and military coups. Democracy has taken root in many countries and is on the rise in many others. Growth has been robust and consistent over the last decade. In fact, many around the world today see Africa as the future hope for the world's economy.

Some reality check

- This is not the first time Africa has made major progress. The key question we need to be asking ourselves now: is whether or not the current progress is sustainable? Can we sustain the growth and economic performance of recent years?
- This is a question that many objective analysts will have difficulty answering in the affirmative because despite the performance there continues to be concerns.
- There is no country in the world that has developed or transformed their economy without upgrading their science and technological capabilities and their capacity for

innovation. This requires a robust educational system from pre-school through technical/vocational training, to university. It requires high levels of quality and standards. It requires a focus on STEM – science, technology, engineering and management.

- In addition to education, there is a need for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. We also must have the necessary infrastructure which is supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship. We must have the finance and financial markets with innovative products. We must be willing to invest in research and development. We must have robust programs to facilitate learning by doing and lifelong learning for the labor force. We must have the institutions which supports innovations and markets. Importantly, we must have what experts called robust “national systems of innovations”, which requires building all the necessary preconditions which are key to building innovative economies and societies.
- A key question we must ask ourselves is whether or not we are there? In many respects, we are not.
- Take education, for example, Africa continues to lag behind other regions. Access and quality continues to be a problem. A key challenge today is the quality and relevance of the educational system in many African countries
- Our systems of innovation are weak relative to other regions. We do very little scientific and technological research and development. Even the little that we do, we are hardly able to convert these into exports.

- Our information and other necessary infrastructure are also weak relative to other regions. Despite the growth in mobile and internet penetration, for example, we remain the region that is least connected. We have issues with transportation, energy and water. The quality of utilities is a problem while costs are among the highest in the world.

Some reasons to hopeful

- There are reasons to be hopeful despite the fact that we are behind and that we are faced with significant challenges.
- First, Africa has changed. It is no longer a “helpless” continent. Importantly, we now have a continent where the people are taking their destinies in their own hands and pushing for change and transformation. A good example is the Arab spring which emerged in North Africa.
- Second, the Governments are also changing and many over the last decade have embarked on major reforms to improve the business environment, promote national competitiveness, and also to enhance the nation’s productive capacity, including innovation. We just need to look at what is happening in Rwanda and Kenya.
- Third, globalization. Globalization can be a friend of Africa. It has contributed to the democratization of knowledge, making access information easier and cheaper, and providing opportunities for learning, etc.

- Fourth, there is assistance. From our experience in Cape Verde, African countries can seize and utilize global goodwill as an opportunity for its scientific and technological advancement. We know development cannot be outsourced and African countries would have to lead their own process of transformation. However, there are opportunities for African countries in the willingness of many friends (nations, organizations and individuals) around the world to help Africa. What is required is that we must drive this process and strategically deploy assistance to areas that match our national needs and agenda.
- Fifth, our global Diaspora is a major strength. There are millions of African's in the Diaspora, especially in the Western countries and other industrial regions. Many are professionals in various fields for science, technology, engineering to finance. Many are entrepreneurs. Many are professors and at the forefront of their fields. In fact, there are no major universities in the world today without African professors. What we need are new strategies and approaches to encourage knowledge transfers. We need to move away from remittances only strategy to new approaches to engage our Diaspora in development and socioeconomic transformation.
- Sixth, at a risk of using a cliché, Africa can leapfrog. This might be an overused word. However, there is credence especially now that I believe that the conditions for Africa's development are coming together. Africa does not have to reinvent the wheel. We can learn from the experiences of other regions and we can avoid their mistakes. Also, in

many areas we do not have to undo or convert, we can simply go for the state of the art and newer technologies.

The good news

- The good news is that innovation is taking place in Africa. Yes, we might be behind. But the fact is that in many parts of the continent today there are efforts and there are results which can be shown. Africa is innovating! Over the last decade, Cape Verde, has invested in e-governance. Today, Cape Verde has become a leader with respect to e-governance as a result of the work under NOSI, our information society agency.
- This is why I am engaged and lending my support for the Africa Innovation Summit. I am excited about the Summit because it will provide an opportunity to:
 - ✓ explore and examine African examples with respect to innovation,
 - ✓ allow Africans to share and learn from each other's experiences,
 - ✓ undertake a critical review to see how to benefit from these Innovations, i.e. how can the innovations be translated into exports and national competitiveness, and
 - ✓ identify key constraints and challenges hindering or constraining the growth of Africa's emerging hubs of innovation and to collectively seek robust solutions.

- I am also excited because the Africa Innovation Summit takes into account the fact that government matters. Unlike other conferences or summits on innovation which is mainly private sector affair or that of academic/researchers. This Summit will bring together all key stakeholders, including governments.
- Also, as my friend, Jose Brito, mentioned earlier in his presentation this is not a talk shop and not a onetime effort. We aim to build a permanent platform for dialogue. We aim to influence policy agenda and supporting the dialogue with evidence based scholarly research by academics and researchers.

In conclusion

- We need your support. We need the support and assistance of everyone here to make this initiative a reality and to achieve our goals of helping to build a more conducive environment in Africa for innovation.
- We have invited you here today because we believe everyone has a role to play and that everyone here can be a catalyst for this initiative.
- We are particularly delighted that President Donald Kaberuka agreed to be part of this launch. The African Development Bank is our partner of choice and a preferred partner for this initiative. We are hopeful that after this launch we can convince ADB to join us and fully support this Africa Innovation Summit and the associated activities.

Thank you.