Rededicating to Africa at a Time of Promise

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President

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A day such as this is special for all of us at the Bank and for its president. It is indeed a statutory moment to swear in a new president, but also a day of pride, a day of reflection, a day of humility, but above all a day of rededication.

Pride of the contribution we, as a Bank, are making to better the condition of Africa; a day of reflection on where we have fallen short; humility in front of the challenges we face; and, above all, a rededication to overcome obstacles to our noble goals.

On the fifth of September, 2005, member countries of the Bank conferred on me the singular honour of leading the Bank for five years. As I assumed office as president of the Bank Group, I fully understood the weight of that responsibility and what it means for any son or daughter of Africa to be called upon to undertake this noble mission. Building on the foundation laid by my six predecessors, and with your support, I believe we have, together, made some headway.

But I am also the first to recognize that the road ahead is a long one. Some of our achievements are still in their infancy; several initiatives can only be described as “works in progress”; and there are still many hills to climb.

Nonetheless, whether it is in consolidating the finances of the institution, building its internal capacity, reorienting the strategic choices, managing successive crises, strengthening partnerships or, above all, delivery where it matters most on the ground, these are achievements to celebrate.

We have, together, demonstrated that the AfDB has come of age, a mature institution that knows what to do, at a time of strong demands on the Bank’s capacity and resources.

Today, member countries entrust me once again with the custody and the honour and responsibility of steering the ship for the next five years at a time of profound changes in Africa and in the global economy.

I am truly humbled by the overwhelming confidence in me as captain of a team: a team of talented and devoted men and women who constitute the management and staff of the Bank to whom I would like to render homage.

As I assume my new term of office I want to thank all who have provided me with their advice, counsel and support during the past five years; my country and my government, for proposing my name for a second time; and all the member countries for your unanimous vote of confidence.

In assuming these responsibilities for a second time, I commit here, today, that we will continue to strive every day to build a world class organization – a purposeful,
responsive institution for which the founding fathers can be proud and of which People of Africa deserve. And that means we must be prepared to deepen and anchor institutional reforms even, and especially when, they appear to be painful or inconvenient.

I have no illusion about the obstacles. I am aware of existing commitments on which in the past we have fallen short. I am cognizant of the complexity of the emerging economic landscape. But I am also fully confident of our determination to succeed. Our resolve is reinforced by the challenges confronting Africa at this time, but also the opportunities now open to her as a result of structural shifts in the global economy.

Our determination is comforted by the solid, sustained support and confidence which member countries have shown to the African Development Bank over the past decades and, especially, the past five years to enable the Bank to respond to Africa’s growing and changing needs. Whether it is the resourcing of the institution, building its internal capacity, extending its reach, or bolstering its ability to adjust to external shocks, you have shown full confidence in your institution.

In so doing, you have shown belief in the promise of Africa, empowering its people in building Africa’s own strong institutions for which the recent historic tripling of the Bank’s capital stands out as a monument. I am fully aware that, going forward, the economic conditions in many partner countries – participants to the ADF – are much tougher, but that political will and commitment to support our mission in Africa remains unwavering. You are right, in return, to demand results and greater effectiveness that commitments we have made internally and externally be adhered to. I undertake here to stay true to that promise of reforms.

The decade gone by, and especially the last three years of that decade, have seen tectonic shifts in the global economy and a shifting discourse on Africa, not only from the perspective of the best World Cup organized, but from McKinsey to Goldmann and a widening constituency of analysts, there is acceptance that the positive momentum Africa has built since the turn of the decade is not a flash in the pan – not another false dawn.

True, in many countries poverty is still deep and growth in per capita incomes is frustratingly slow. In short, we have not yet attained escape velocity, but the ground has shifted.

As we move forward in the next five years – consolidating our strategic options – we must now take cognizance of these profound changes in the global economy and the renewed confidence and momentum in much of Africa.
There is little doubt our strategic directions remain valid: deepening regional integration; developing the private sector; closing the infrastructure gap, particularly energy; enhancing high-level technical skills, building strong governance and institutions; and, of course, support to fragile states.

These are, and they remain, the strategic axes best placed to support Africa’s momentum. A special challenge remains climate change and its implications, including for energy and food security.

As we deepen and consolidate our strategic options, two particular areas of the new landscape require us to adapt with agility and innovation.

First, adapting to a world of tight budgets and tough budgetary choices from our traditional partners. This will require of us – all international financial institutions – stronger partnerships and a meaningful division of labour. But, more important, we must begin now to innovate around how to leverage and assure effectiveness of each dollar to the African Development Fund and giving functional meaning to the idea of the One Bank model.

Secondly, exploiting the opportunities created by the structural shifts in the global economy to enable Africa to reap the dividends by building enduring partnerships with the emerging poles of those opportunities rather than being simply purveyor of raw materials,

But, in order to do so, we will need to fully understand this new ecosystem. We will need to ask ourselves the question about our instruments, our methods, our model – which; remember, date back to the 1960s.

In the next five years, I intend to strongly reinforce our internal knowledge generation and dissemination capacity, to inform our own work in this area, but also to determine how best Africa draws dividends from this new global economy.

Let me conclude. In four years’ time the African Development Bank will commemorate its golden jubilee: 50 years of service to Africa. It is customary of late to sometimes minimize the achievements of this continent in the past half a century, but take a look at the AfDB: from a modest institution in 1964 to a global player at par with the best in the world, delivering in 2009 alone 12 billion dollars of support. It is an institution that makes Africa proud.

Take another look at this mosaic that is Africa’s 53 countries. You will see a lot that can be dispiriting, but also, much worth of celebration – a continent that is steadily unlocking its potential, charting its fresh course in a changing global economy.
This morning, together, we rededicate our energy, our talent and our imagination to that Africa – a time of much hope and promise.

Thank you.