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**„Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe's External Relations“**  
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Ambassador Chikane, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind invitation and for giving me the opportunity to address this audience. Judging by the programme and the contribution I heard this morning, you must have had a very intense and, I am convinced, very productive day. You have tackled African and European relations from different points of view, from African and European perspectives, from the angle of government officials, of members of think tanks, political parties and sub regional organisations.

Coming from an institution that is formulating and implementing foreign policy, both with a national and a European perspective, I am looking forward to the results and conclusions of your meeting. I want to restrict myself to raise a couple of points on one particular issue: The upcoming EU-Africa summit in Lisbon.

Europe's relations with Africa have come a long way since the Rome treaties, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we celebrated in March. Whilst in 1957 the African countries and territories in question couldn't even actively participate in the negotiations of those treaties (part IV of the EEC treaty) associating them with the then EEC, 50 years later the situation is a different one:

The EU and Africa are about to embark for the first time on a really joint venture, namely the Joint EU-Africa Strategy and a first Action Plan. Both documents, right now technically still under negotiation, are to be formally adopted at the Lisbon EU-Africa summit in December. Between these two milestones, Rome and Lisbon, there existed, as many of you will recall, a succession of conventions between the European community, later EU, and primarily, but not exclusively, African states.

All these instruments bear the names of African capitals, yet their remit is not limited to Africa alone, but comprises the ACP group of countries. The Yaoundé, Lagos and Arusha Conventions were followed by some 25 years of the Lomé System. And since April 2003 we live in the Cotonou Era.

In April 2000, African and European leaders, under the aegis of the then OAU (Organization of African Unity) and the EU, met for the first time for a bicontinental summit in Cairo and passed the Cairo Declaration.

When they will meet again, 7 years later, in Lisbon on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of December, their objectives will be more ambitious: The partnership African and European countries are about to commence, is to be based on a new fundament and shall assume a new quality. The relations between the continents and between the two regional groups, the AU and the EU, will in future be oriented by the J o i n t EU-Africa Strategy.

The strategy will be implemented via action plans, which will cover a period of 2 to 3 years. The Strategy and the first Action Plan have been elaborated, as the name implies, jointly – which constitutes some kind of a novum in Afro-European relations.

I had the pleasure to participate in a similar effort between EU and Latin America / Caribbean, showing that results depend on the dynamics of the process, not just on words in lengthy communiques.

It is high time that the leaders of the 2 neighbouring continents and the members of two important regional organisations gather anew, speak to each other, take stock and map a shared future for their countries and peoples.

There is certainly no lack of subjects of common interest: Energy and climate change; the achievement of the millennium development goals in Africa; migration; trade and investment; peace and security in Africa, but also in the rest of the world; good governance and human rights, to name but a few.

The seminar's first guiding questions aptly formulates: 'challenges perceived: outlining the challenges on a global and regional scale'. Those very challenges will figure right on top of the Lisbon summit's agenda.

Both sides do recognize that "cooperation" is not only "desired" (as the second guiding question insinuates and goes on to ask: 'which challenges need to be tackled jointly by European and African partners?'), but that such cooperation is urgently required.

The joint strategy and the first action plan will address those challenges and initiate concrete cooperation in a number of key areas.

The process leading up to the summit has proven fruitful: Both sides have expressed their desire not to merely repeat what has been done on previous occasions, but to impart a new dimension to the relationship.

The new dimension, or paradigm, is that of a partnership amongst equals, 'on an equal footing', as the expression goes, trying to the extent possible to move away from the traditional donor-recipient to a more cooperative and business like relationship. Based on this premise, the expert meetings have elaborated the two documents mentioned, which should serve as a solid foundation for an ambitious and long term strategic partnership between the EU and Africa, and which at the same time should be able to deliver concrete positive results for the people in Africa, Europe and beyond.

The preparation process was also remarkable inasmuch as it tried to involve the civil society (through a web-based consultation process and subsequent conferences) in gathering proposals and ideas for the joint strategy and action plan.

The joint strategy has four main long-term objectives:

It wants to enable the EU-African political partnership to address issues of common concern.

This requires strong political and institutional ties, with the EU and the AU at the centre of such a dialogue.

It aims at promoting peace, security, sustainable development, democratic governance and human rights, regional integration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. It sets out to jointly promote a system of effective multilateralism and to jointly address global challenges and common concerns. It also intends to promote a broad-based people-centred partnership.

Ongoing dialogue with civil society on issues covered by the strategy is considered a key component to ensure its implementation.

As strategic priorities, the strategy defines the areas of 1) peace and security, 2) governance and human rights, 3) trade and regional integration and 4) key development issues.

Does the Lisbon summit have the potential to become a turning point in the relations between Africa and Europe or will it be perceived as a matter of old wine in new bottles?

A lot evidently will depend on the summit itself. Even more important is the follow-up process. The joint strategy is meant to be a long-term one. The action plans by contrast will cover a period of 2 to 3 years each and will upon their expiration be newly negotiated by the two parties, thereby allowing for a high degree of adaptability to changing circumstances and requirements.

The summit and the strategy certainly have the potential of adding a new dimension to the relationship between the two continents and political blocks. It depends on us how we will manage this partnership. Looking at how far we have come over the past 50 years, we have some cause for optimism.

There is a debate how to make that partnership an equal partnership. We are realistic enough to know that there are differences in population, area, political and economic power. But what is needed is absolute equality in accepting the partners in their dignity, and in the search for our common destiny.

The last guiding question specifies: Which challenges require genuine African or European means and solutions? Which issues and approaches are the most contested ones?

I cannot leave out one problem that gave rise to debates before the summit: Chancellor Merkel made clear in her Press Conference during her visit to Pretoria in October 2007 that all states of Africa should be invited to the summit. Should Mugabe choose to participate, the European participants will deal with the situation of human rights in Zimbabwe during the summit, confronting him directly with our clear views on his performance. However, it would be regrettable if the Lisbon summit were to be dominated by the Zimbabwe issue and we will do our best to help avoid such a scenario. There are certainly much more pressing issues to be discussed between the 2 continents.

The European Union declares it wants to assist African countries contain the brain drain, at the same time European Commissioner Frattini presents the blue card initiative, which aims to attract 20 mio. migrants to an aging Europe, that is also short of qualified manpower. No easy answers, but many questions to be asked in the contested issues field...

Let me finish with a thought on the future of Afro-European relations. A lot is currently being written and said about the presence of China, and to a lesser extent, of other new players in Africa. Some alarmists already see European actors being displaced and driven out of Africa. This is certainly not going to happen.

What might happen is something different: China and other actors came to Africa to stay and in a globalizing world it cannot be otherwise. The presence of new partners will afford Africans an opportunity to distance themselves from their oldest but at the same time most complicated partnership.

And in this distancing, in this taking a step back, probably lies a big chance for the relationship between Africa and Europe: It allows a re-evaluation of the ties, a re-appreciation of commonalities, common values and a shared culture.

This offers in turn the opportunity for a reapproximation, on a higher, more mature level. And in Europe one certainly will observe mirror images of that process. There are many reasons to be optimistic about the future of those relations. And maybe one should even add a fourth guiding question: Chances to be explored!

Thank you!