

Address to the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy

King George Hotel, Athens, 24 February 2005

Chairperson, Professor Theodore Kouloumbis,
Members of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege and honour to visit this beautiful country and have an opportunity to address such an important gathering of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy. I am indeed very happy because I see this as part of the important engagement that must define the relationship between this cradle of western civilization and the people of Africa.

This is the relationship that historians and scholars would say is the continuation of a close and intimate relationship that the ancient Greece and the ancient Egypt in particular shared for hundreds of years; a relationship which is noted in the writings of such great philosophers as Plato and Aristotle who made inferences to the great temples of learning in places such as the Thebes and Memphis in ancient Egypt.

History correctly credits and documents the enormous influence of Greek political development on Europe, wherefrom it spread widely and rapidly to many parts of the world, including Africa.

Many Africans are proud that the ideas of Greek democracy arising from the concept of the City-state, the Council of the Wise, the establishment of the Senate and other participatory processes found easy resonance with African traditional mechanisms for consultation and decision-making. Perhaps this is expected since the civilisation of the ancient Egypt had a profound impact on the subsequent Greece civilisation.

While in modern times the nascent systems of democratic participation in Africa could not blossom due to the interventions of the brutal systems of slavery and colonialism, we are however happy that the democratic seeds planted by the ancestors of this ancient land have germinated and developed into sophisticated foundations of modern civilizations, of which many of us throughout the world embrace.

And so, today we have come here to the shores of the Hellas to share and exchange ideas on the current challenges facing our common world.

The last part of Michael Edwards' book, 'Future Positive -International Co-operation In The 21st Century', has this to say:

"Much of the world has developed at breakneck speed over the last 200 years, but we are still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other, and unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger. We have the resources, the technology, the ideas and the wealth, but we don't yet have the will and imagination to harness these things to higher purpose. ...Hundreds of detailed proposals have been made, and hundreds more have been made by others, but none has the slightest guarantee of success. The only certainty is the certainty of struggle, and life, as M. Scott Peck is fond of saying 'is what happens when we plan something else'. What lies ahead is the still-constant movement of engagement and retreat, two steps forward and one step back, that demands the courage and conviction to carry on regardless." (P232, Published by Earthscan Publications Ltd, 1999)

Michael Edwards wrote this book in 1999, obviously reflecting mainly on the developments of the 20th century with regard to matters of peace, poverty and underdevelopment. He was reflecting on what the international community had done or not done in a century that was about to come to an end.

Accordingly, given the destructive fury of the two world wars, the countless liberation wars from colonialism and racism, many other regional wars and internecine conflicts in all parts of the world in the last century, it would have been difficult to disagree with Edwards when he said in 1999 that "we are still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other".

And because as we were approaching the end of the 20th century, global poverty and hunger were on the increase amidst unprecedented affluence resulting in an ever-growing disparity between rich and poor, between and within nations, none would have disputed the assertion that: "(we are) unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger"; even though, as Edwards said, "we have the resources, the technology, the ideas and the wealth, but don't yet have the will and imagination to harness these things to higher purpose".

Accordingly, I think it will be important to look at what the global community, including Africa, has done since 1999 in the context of what Michael Edwards had said in his book.

I would like to start first with developments on the African continent since 1999 and then move to the global response to the situation of poverty and underdevelopment since the year 2000 and then assess whether we are on course to bring peace and stability in the world and defeat the scandal of global poverty and hunger.

As we bade farewell to the last century and welcomed the 21st century, the poverty and underdevelopment in Africa stood in stark contrast to the prosperity and development of the rich countries of the North.

Africa was politically and economically marginalized and the vast majority of her people socially excluded.

Half of the 800 million people on the African continent lived on less than US\$1 per day while the mortality rate of children under five years of age was 140 per 1000. Only 58 percent of the population had access to safe water. The rate of illiteracy for people over 15 was 41 percent and there were only 18 mainline telephones per 1000 people compared with 146 for the world and 567 for developed countries.

(Source: NEPAD document)

In the three decades before the end of the 20th century, a number of interventions were made to address the poverty and underdevelopment of the African continent. In the main, these initiatives, even though well-intentioned, were designed by outsiders for Africans, with little input from the Africans themselves. Some of these interventions led to a debt crisis that is still a stranglehold on many African countries.

Of course this desperate reality at the end of the 20th century is part of a long story of African impoverishment that was accentuated by the legacy of colonialism, the cold war, the inequalities in the workings of the international economic and financial systems and the incorrect policies pursued by many African countries in the post-independence era.

Faced with this desperate situation, the political leadership on the African continent decided to answer the correct, yet gloomy assertion of Michael Edwards that: "we are still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other, and unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger". As Africans, we said we are willing to address these pertinent issues raised by Edwards - the issues of peace and stability as well as the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment.

Indeed, we even went further to deal with such important matters as democracy, peoples and human rights and other matters that are central to the attainment of a developed and prosperous Africa.

In this regard, two processes were critical. We transformed the Organisation of the African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU).

This was important and necessary because although the OAU played a disciplined and steadfast role to defeat colonialism and apartheid on the continent, we needed a new type of organisation with a fresh mandate to face the contemporary continental and international challenges.

Central among these were the challenges of development, peace and stability, democracy and people and human rights.

To respond to the critical challenge of widespread poverty and underdevelopment facing many African countries, Africans produced an AU development programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This programme was initiated by the African political leadership who made the commitment that: "The New Partnership for Africa's Development is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, to participate actively in the world economy and body politic. The programme is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world."

Initiated by the political leadership on the African continent, the programme is now supported and has been adopted by various sectors of the African people, coming from different stations in life.

Through NEPAD we have identified numerous programmes around water, energy, telecommunication and transport infrastructure, human resources development initiatives including work on expanding access to education, especially for rural communities, access to ICT's improving the health infrastructure on the continent and paying special attention to communicable diseases such as TB, AIDS and Malaria and mobilising for affordable drugs.

An important part of NEPAD is the issue of food security and the improvement of the agricultural sector, ensuring better capacity and efficiency and improving investment in this sector. Related to this is the critical matter of market access to the markets of the developed nation.

Further, as we know, Africa is a huge mining continent. Yet, the beneficiation of the raw materials has, for many years been done exclusively in Europe. Accordingly, a process of building a strong value addition capacity in the mining industry has started, beginning with South Africa.

We have also, through NEPAD, initiated what we call The African Peer Review Mechanism. The primary purpose of the Peer Review Mechanism is to ensure the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through the sharing of experiences and the reinforcement of successful and best practices, including the identification of deficiencies and an assessment of needs for capacity building. It is a self-assessment mechanism that is meant to ensure broad-based buy-in and ownership of the development process;

On the matters of peace, stability and democracy we have created some of the important organs of the AU, including the Peace and Security Council and the Pan African Parliament. Already, the Peace and Security Council is playing an important role in some of the conflict areas on the continent.

Indeed, the AU is working to bring permanent peace to the Cote d'Ivoire and in collaboration with the UN to do the same in the Darfur region in Sudan. As part of entrenching and consolidating democracy on the continent we have worked tirelessly with the people of the DRC and Burundi, the result of which is that both countries will be holding democratic elections this year, ushering a new era away from decades of conflicts and autocracy.

Chairperson,

For our efforts to succeed in all we are doing, we have placed special emphasis on the need for partnerships between and within the African countries, between Africa and other developing countries and between Africa and the developed world. Naturally, these partnerships would take various forms such as government to government, people to people, regional partnerships and other important forms.

We do all these because we have a pressing duty to ensure that we place the urgent issues of development and their implementation on the global agenda in a systematic and consistent manner until the metaphorical global village ceases to be separated into two sections, one developed and rich, the other underdeveloped and poor.

Accordingly, we continue to work, in addition to the efforts on our own continent, through the UN and other multilateral bodies, with our partners in the North and South, and with regional groupings like the EU.

We are happy that the partnerships that we are talking about were given concrete expression when, last year, the EU development Ministers made a commitment to advance the important matters of peace, security and development in Africa. They decided to show political and financial leadership in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, with a special emphasis and focus on Africa.

In this regard, the EU has taken a decision to establish the African Peace Facility as well as the European Security and Development Policy for Africa. This will enable Europeans to respond more effectively to Africa's security needs.

This Fund is a manifestation of a decision by African leaders during the AU Summit held in Maputo in 2003, to set up a facility from funds allocated to African countries through the EU development co-operation agreements with Africa and will finance peacekeeping operations in Africa.

Further, we support the initiatives of the European Union in restructuring ODA funding, which will then permit the use of ODA funds for purposes of post-conflict reconstruction and development. In particular, it will enable Africa to utilise ODA funds for the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of combatants into civil society. This includes the very vulnerable group of child-soldiers.

We are also confident that the G8 Summit of this year will strengthen and give more impetus to NEPAD and take the African Agenda forward. As we know, Prime Minister Tony Blair who this year chairs both the G8 and the EU is giving special priority to the challenges facing the African continent.

These partnerships between the G8 and Africa and the EU and Africa are responding in a concrete manner to Michael Edwards' observation in 1999 that 'we are still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other, and unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger'. Clearly, the next stage is the actual implementation that must surely bring tangible results of a better life.

Chairperson;

Since the year 2000, when the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals, it seems as if the international community generally was at last also able to answer in the affirmative the challenge posed by Edwards.

Not only did the world community through the United Nations adopt far-reaching measures to address the scandal of poverty and underdevelopment in the face of available resources. The leaders of the nations of the world, both rich and poor, pledged themselves to implement agreed programmes within specific time-frames.

As we know, in addition to the Millennium Goals the UN adopted other important decisions aimed bringing a better life to all the peoples of the world. These include the Johannesburg Plan of Action on Sustainable Development, the Monterrey Consensus on development finance and the Doha Round of the WTO.

This year, the international community will have the opportunity to review some of these agreements particularly the Millennium Goals, the Doha Round as well as the Copenhagen Social Summit and the Beijing's Women Summit both of which will, during the course of 2005 mark a decade since they were convened.

We are however concerned that most of the targets contained in the Millennium Development Goals and supported by the Johannesburg Plan of Action, will not be met, something that may confirm the belief that we are 'still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other, and unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger'.

It will therefore be important that we use the occasion of the review of the Millennium Development Goals during the UNGA in September this year to frankly and honestly deal with the real reasons that have delayed the implementation of these goals. Certainly, it is not because there is a lack of resources to address poverty and underdevelopment in the world.

Certainly, it is not because we do not have the plans to defeat poverty and underdevelopment. It is simply because there is no political will to address and defeat poverty and underdevelopment.

Among the things we need to do is the urgent implementation of the Monterrey targets, in addition to successfully completing the Doha Round.

An important and related matter to all these is the reform and democratisation of the United Nations which we believe would be taken forward during the course of this year. I believe that once the reform process is completed, we will see greater balance between issues of development and those of security.

Indeed, the UN Report on Threats, Challenges and Change has adopted a broad perspective on security and correctly recognised the interrelated nature of security and development and especially emphasises the fact that development is an indispensable foundation for a new collective security system.

In this regard, I believe that the leadership such as has convened today, has a role to play as part of the agents of change that advocate for the full implementation of the agreed positions of the UN and other multilateral structures; always forming regional and global partnerships so that together we can harness our collective energies and ensure that the poor and the marginalised will begin to lead a better life.

Chairperson;

We have just celebrated 10 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa. During this period, we have taken numerous strides in advancing the quality of life of our people through deliberate and targeted programmes of reconstruction and development. We are confident that in the next decade, we will make even greater progress in pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

At the same time, South Africa, perhaps more than any other place in the world has the unenviable task of creating a non-racial and non-sexist society out of a population which for the past three and half centuries has been deliberately divided, taught to hate each other, whites made to believe that there are superior to their black compatriots and resources directed at the development and prosperity of the white population at the expense of blacks.

The last ten years has been challenging, both with regard to the possibilities of creating a strong South African nation, united in its diversity as well as the daunting reality of entrenched stereotypes among

some of our people. Yet, we are encouraged by the manner in which ordinary South Africans, black and white have found creative ways of forging ahead with this project of creating a successful non-racial and non-sexist society.

In 1994 some South Africans packed their bags and left for Europe, North America and Australia and New Zealand. Today, inspired by an initiative by fellow white South Africans, called 'Homecoming Revolution', many of those who left are returning determined to make their contribution to the success of this South African project of building a non-racial and non-sexist society.

Because we are confident that we will succeed, we invite all of you to visit our country and witness a project that in reality belongs to all of humanity.

Having observed perennial conflicts and wars, debilitating and acute levels of poverty and underdevelopment, Michael Edwards made bold to say: "we are still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other, and unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger."

I will like to invite you, the descendents of the ancestors of democracy, to join us as we respond to Edwards' assertion and together forge partnerships that will show the way by making whatever contribution to ensure that we live at peace with ourselves and with each other; that we help to make the available resources, technology, ideas and wealth to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment.

Together we can!

I thank you.