

Statement by the Rector to
Symposium on the African Perspective on the
New International Economic Order

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
5 May 1981

(To be read by Dr. Mushakoji)

On behalf of the United Nations University, a co-sponsor of this symposium with Addis Ababa University, I want to express our deep gratitude to the participants who have gathered here to discuss the African perspectives of the New International Economic Order. May I also take this opportunity to thank our co-sponsors, and in particular President Duri Mohammed, for having done so much to make this important symposium a reality.

The UN University, which was established by the General Assembly and is now in its sixth year of operation, is engaged in organizing a global dialogue among the international community of scientists and scholars, seeking their insight and wisdom about ways to move into a 21st century which will be more just, humane and secure for all of humankind. The University views this symposium as one in which your contributions can provide much needed and vital input from the African scholarly community to that dialogue.

The UNU, through its Charter, is mandated to study "the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations and its agencies." It is therefore most

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appropriate and fitting that a central concern of its work should be with the conditions necessary for the establishment of a New International Economic Order.

In the view of large segments of the world's four billion people, the present international order has ceased to be morally acceptable. The inequities and injustices built into the present world system must be removed if humankind is to have any real hope of survival. A new international order -- not only economic, but also political, social and cultural -- is a matter of life and death to the majority of the peoples of the third world, who live a life deprived of the most elementary guarantees for survival, development and welfare.

To gain universal recognition and acceptability, the new order which is sought will have to be built on strong moral foundations -- both within all our own societies as well as in the larger international system. This assumption lies at the heart of the effort by the UNU's Human and Social Development Programme to engage academic and scientific communities from the different world regions in a dialogue across cultural, social and ideological boundaries on regional perspectives of the NIEO.

Africa has a special role to play in this dialogue. Historically, it is the continent which has suffered the most direct and sustained exploitation of its peoples and resources -- a tragic record stretching back half a millenium to the 15th century, when the emerging European world economy first intruded on these shores. Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, virtually the whole continent was the victim of colonialism, its people sorely abused in the international capitalist division of labour. Even now, in its post-colonial phase, exploitation

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has not ended.

Despite its rich resources -- 97 per cent of the world's chromium, 85 per cent of its platinum, 64 per cent of its manganese -- the African continent counts 20 of the 31 least developed countries. Fully half of the countries of Africa now face severe food shortages. It is the victim of both natural calamities -- famine, drought and endemic disease -- and human calamities -- war, poverty, racism and apartheid.

Reviewing these sad annals of so much human suffering and injustice, one is moved to agree with the observation by the Ghanaian philosopher and educator, the late J.E.K. Aggrey, that when he looked at the map of Africa, it always seemed to be asking the question -- Why? Why are my children dying? Why were they enslaved? Why is Africa the least developed among the continents?

Overcoming the cruel toll that this sad litany of "whys" have imposed on this continent and its people will require an effort from both within and without Africa. While the African states rightly recognize the international dimensions of their present condition -- as is made quite clear and explicit, for example, in the Lagos Resolution on the Participation of Africa in International Negotiations -- there must be equal stress by the countries of Africa on the development of the inherent capabilities of their own peoples. Self-reliance is but an idle dream unless accompanied by a re-establishment and reassertion of each and every individual's self-identity.

In this connexion, it is heartening to see so many thoughtful Africans looking ahead rather than to the past or present -- for Africa is the continent of the future, a vast, potentially rich land where

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vision exists and bold plans are now taking shape for building a strong regional base for a new international economic order.

There has been the wisdom too to see a common and collective future in the resolution to create between now and the year 2000 an African Economic Community to realize economic, cultural and social integration of the continent. Such a community, in the words of the Lagos statement, will aim "at promoting a collective, accelerated, self-reliant and endogenous development of the member states."

The Lagos Plan of Action is eloquent testament to this great continent's resolve -- now free of its colonial shackles -- to achieve economic liberation as well. It shows Africa's determination to use its immense resources to satisfy the needs and aspirations of its people and seek self-reliance through a vast mobilization of its great natural and human potential. The Plan of Action speaks to a programme aimed at building an Africa of the 21st century at the forefront of the third world fight for a New International Economic Order.

But all of this lofty vision, which, if achieved, could help not only Africans but all of humankind to advance into the 21st century in peace and justice, will go a-glimmering unless it is accompanied by a great deal of tough and creative thought and hard-nosed empirical research. It will require the best of efforts by Africa's scientists and intellectuals, working together in harmony and respect for the perspectives and values of fellow African scholars. And beyond that to collaboration with fellow scholars in both the developing and industrialized worlds.

The United Nations University, whose Charter specifies that it

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shall be "an international community of scholars," has a deep interest in the African continent's contribution to the North-South debate on the New International Economic Order. It offers its services, as a ready and tested instrument of global scholarly dialogue, to the African academic community for furtherance of their regional research plans on building the future of this great continent.

The UNU is now exploring new and different research activities on, for example, the international economic system, the process of global and social transformation, the interlinked problems of food and energy supply and demand, and the appropriate role of applied as well as basic science and technology in development. It hopes to develop with academic and scientific communities around the world a mutually beneficial and collaborative process of research and education.

This symposium is by no means the first time that the UNU has come to Africa nor sought the rich insights and perspectives of its sons and daughters. During its relatively short life, the University has benefited immensely from the wisdom and dedication of African scholars and scientists on our governing Council, our advisory committees, and our headquarters and field staffs. UNU research on problems of hunger, better resource use, and human development is now underway in many African countries. I hope that this symposium, devoted to a topic which is central of the UNU's work, will further longer term, mutually supportive co-operation and dialogue between the University and the African scholarly community. In closing, let me wish you all success in your deliberations.

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