

Summer 2007

Keynote Address

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Recommended Citation

Barbara Masekela, *Keynote Address*, 5 NW. J. INT'L HUM. RTS. 326 (2007).
<http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njihr/vol5/iss3/2>

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Honorable Barbara Masekela

Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to the United States

¶1 Africa is in the throes of an historic rebirth. Two decades ago dictatorships were commonplace; today such regimes are a dwindling minority. Democracy, under girded by responsible economic policies, is starting to bloom. In the past seven years, more than two thirds of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa have held multi-party elections. Peaceful democratic changes of government are becoming the norm as we saw in Zambia's elections several days ago.

¶2 Africa is breaking out of the paradigm of dependency. To this end the African Union (AU) has elaborated its own development program, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). We have launched the African Peer Review Mechanism to assess and strengthen our practice of good political and economic governance - the ingredients for stability and prosperity. To date, 26 African countries including South Africa, have agreed to voluntary peer review assessments. With our partners, both multilaterally and bilaterally, we are redefining the concept of conflict resolution to include development as a key precondition for peace and stability.

¶3 Since 1994, South Africa has invested its resources, human and economic, in diplomatic efforts across the African continent. We believe our national interest is best served by tackling poverty and underdevelopment, promoting democracy and good governance and supporting peaceful and lasting resolution of conflicts throughout our region and beyond.

¶4 Our approach to peace and development is informed by our own experience in dealing with three hundred years of colonialism and apartheid. We have learned that for any process to be successful, be it resolving conflict, writing a constitution, or post-conflict reconstruction and development, it must be a collective and inclusive effort. All stakeholders must feel that their interests are clearly understood and fully appreciated. It is our experience that making unconditional demands is more often than not a recipe for failure.

¶5 It was in the spirit of seeking lasting consensus and inclusion that we began our democratic journey with the elections of 1994. Our first task was to complete work on a new constitution that reflected true consensus after generations of bitter division and malign neglect.

¶6 Reaching consensus on the constitution was not easy. Some wanted fewer protections for property rights. Others were opposed to granting justiciable second generation rights to housing, health care, and clean water. Some hoped for greater recognition of group rights. Some thought it was a mistake to adopt list-based proportional representation. But in the end we all came away feeling ownership in the result.

¶7 Because of that we can today take pride in being members of a tolerant and stable society. We have a strong economy because our leaders knew that in order to realize the ambitious social agenda we set for ourselves in the constitution we would have to create the wealth to pay for it. And what helped us create the wealth? Peace, stability and property rights that are just as secure as they are in the US.

¶8 We chose a path of reconciliation, establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, in the conviction that the truth would set us free from the pain, cruelty and hatred of the past. As difficult as we found it to sit together and chart the way forward with our oppressors and torturers, we realized that for the country to move forward, we could not allow the past to stop us from building a brighter future.

¶9 Such, then, are the basic principles that guide South Africa in our engagement with the world, and particularly in our efforts to help resolve conflict in our continent and beyond. In this spirit of nurturing consensus, inclusion and respect for diverse perspectives, we try to use our experience to build bridges rather than barriers to peace. And naturally we seek to build consensus with our partners in the African Union and advance the positions on which we have agreed.

¶10 The international community's support is critical to our efforts, and I would like to recognize the support of the US Administration in our collective efforts to promote peace in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire and other parts of Africa. We are committed to strengthening our common efforts to bring about sustainable peace to other nations and regions wracked by conflict.

¶11 The situation in Darfur has become an emotional and complex issue, for as the toll of violence mounts, so too do demands for more definitive and aggressive intervention. Often, however, these demands are made without careful regard to the fact that for such interventions to be sustainable it is not enough to focus simply on ending the immediate humanitarian tragedy, wrenching as it is. We must work for lasting solutions that take into account the full complexity of the realities on the ground.

¶12 South Africa is of the view that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and the South provides an appropriate framework for the resolution of the crisis in Darfur. In our view any agreement about the future of Darfur has to be consistent with the objectives of the CPA. It is for this reason that South Africa, in our capacity as Chair of the AU Post Conflict and Reconstruction Committee, continues to mobilize resources to strengthen the capacity of the South to govern and deliver better services to its people.

¶13 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1706 made it clear that the international community favored a transition from the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) to a United Nations Mission. Clearly the Government of Sudan takes a different view. As a result, the AMIS mandate has been extended to 31 December 2006. As recognized by Jose Manuel Barroso, European Commission President, the AMIS has to be strengthened. In this regard South Africa is currently contributing a sizeable number of troops in Darfur, and our Parliament has just approved a further deployment to strengthen the mission. In the meantime, the African Union Peace and Security Council will continue to engage both the Sudanese Government and the United Nations with the view to resolving the impasse.

¶14 While there is no simple solution to the stalemate, we are fully aware that thousands of people are facing extreme conditions. For that reason South Africa will not

only continue to support the AMIS mission, but also continue to work through the African Union and its structures to search for a resolution to the crisis that will both safeguard the people of Darfur and have the support of all the stakeholders in Sudan.

¶15 As you know, democratic elections were held in the Democratic Republic of Congo for the first time in forty years. This was a gargantuan undertaking both for the people of DRC and for the international community. There are still 18,000 UN peace-keepers on the ground including South African forces. We remain committed to seeing this process continue and succeed. The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country with tremendous potential, vast natural resources and incredible human potential and we are excited about its future prospects.

¶16 There has been significant progress in consolidating the peace process in Burundi. We remain committed to supporting the people of Burundi and their leaders in building a peaceful future. We have moved beyond securing a ceasefire agreement and now seek to build the capacity and institutions to make the peace sustainable. This is a critical phase in the post-conflict reconstruction effort and requires the ongoing and expanded support of the international community.

¶17 President Mbeki, as the facilitator of the peace process in Cote d'Ivoire, recently met with President Gbagbo as well as representatives from other parties in order to find ways of moving the process forward. It is clear that elections will not take place at the scheduled date. However, South Africa, on behalf of the AU, will continue to support the process where possible.

¶18 Just as political freedom is unsustainable if not supported by socio-economic development, so will our joint political and diplomatic efforts fail if not underpinned by a long-term developmental vision. It is for this reason that we place a great deal of emphasis on eradicating the sources of conflict on the continent.

¶19 We remain convinced that only through constructive dialogue will we be able to bring about the kind of world we all hope for. Therefore, we remain committed to promoting our domestic interests abroad through dialogue and engagement. Dialogue has always been our strength and we shall not give in to the temptation to use our relative strength in other areas to pursue narrow self-interests.