

BANK OF BOTSWANA

PRESS RELEASE

Press Statement on the Commission for Africa
by

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Commissioner
and
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1. Introduction

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you all and, in particular, to our special guests - His Excellency, The British High Commissioner to Botswana and his Deputy, Mr David Merry and Mr John Smith, the Head of the Secretariat of the Commission for Africa (who is based in London), Mr Myles Wickstead, and his colleague, Ms Cecily Smith.

The aim of this Press Conference is to explain the purpose of the Commission for Africa, of which I am a member, having been appointed by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Rt Honourable Tony Blair earlier this year.

This Press Conference is unique because of the subject matter – indeed it is the first of its kind since it does not address any of the regular Bank of Botswana issues, as is otherwise the norm each time we get together on these premises.

I will outline the background, objectives and composition of the Commission, and Mr Wickstead will shed more light, a little later, on the business of the Commission.

2. Background

There is overwhelming evidence that, despite having registered some progress in some areas, Africa has largely lagged behind in terms of economic growth, with the majority of countries experiencing little or no growth in the past 40 years, per capita incomes declining, and over half of the population of sub-Saharan Africa (about 315 million people) living below the poverty datum line. Child mortality is high and HIV/AIDS is a major challenge; half of women over 15 years are illiterate; there has been large scale natural resource depletion; conflict and insecurity remain a concern in many countries, and twenty-three countries are at the risk of not meeting any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In contrast, the past 25 years have seen remarkable progress in other parts of the developing world, particularly in Asia. Reforms in China have meant that over a billion people have experienced a period of unprecedented growth and poverty reduction; India has initiated far-reaching economic reforms. Life expectancy has increased from the mid-40s to the mid-60s; illiteracy has halved in the past 30 years; and the number of people living on less than a dollar a day has fallen by 200 million, at a time when the world's population has grown by 1.5 billion.

Africa has no choice but to join in these positive developments, break out of pessimism and move towards a major acceleration of economic development. Hence the Commission for Africa has been established to contribute to African, G8 and other international efforts towards this end. The intention is to take advantage of the coincidence of the UK chairmanship of both the G8 and European Union in 2005, and put Africa at the top of the agenda. 2005 also happens to be the first deadline for achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals, many of which will not be met in Africa, even by the final

deadline of 2015, unless new ideas are developed and acted upon rapidly. This commendable initiative is a demonstration of the personal commitment of Prime Minister Blair to use the UK presidencies of the G8 and European Union in 2005 to make a real difference on Africa.

3. Objectives

The Commission aims at:

identifying global trends that influence Africa's development;
generating new ideas and action for a strong and prosperous Africa;
supporting the best of the existing work on Africa, in particular the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union;
helping to deliver implementation of the existing international commitments towards Africa;
offering a fresh and positive perspective for Africa and its diverse culture in the 21st century, which challenges unfair perceptions and helps deliver changes; and
understanding and helping to fulfil aspirations for the future by listening to Africans.

There is no doubt that the Commission provides an opportunity for a fresh look at Africa's past and present, and the international community's role, from which to agree clear recommendations for a brighter future.

The Commission will not duplicate or replace existing international processes. It will seek to support and encourage the best of existing work, in particular the African leadership shown through NEPAD and the African Union.

4. The Commissioners

There are 17 Commissioners with a variety of experiences. They are working in an independent capacity and their views will not represent those of the institutions and/or governments for which they may work. More than half are African and the work of the Commission involves as many Africans and African organisations as possible, as well as a wide participation from others around the world who care about Africa and can make a difference to its future.

The Commission comprises the following individuals:

- Prime Minister Tony Blair, United Kingdom (Chairman)
- Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development (Deputy Chairman)
- Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia
- President Benjamin Mkapa, Tanzania
- Gordon Brown, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer
- Ralph Goodale, Minister of Finance for Canada
- Trevor Manuel, Minister of Finance for South Africa
- Linah Mohohlo, Governor of the Bank of Botswana
- Michel Camdessus, former Managing Director of the IMF
- Dr K Y Amoako, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa
- Dr William Kalema, Chairman of Uganda Investment Authority
- Dr Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of the UN Centre for Human Settlements
- Fola Adeola, Director of Guaranty Trust Bank, Nigeria
- Sir Bob Geldof, Musician and African development activist (Irish)
- Senator Nancy Kassebaum-Baker, USA
- Tidjane Thiam, former Minister of Planning, Development and Coordination, Côte d'Ivoire
- Ji Peiding, Member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and Vice Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, China.

5. Themes and Work Programme

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The Commissioners are divided into six groups to address specific issues afflicting the continent, although the Commission work programme is designed to ensure that they contribute to all areas. This reflects the inherent links and cross cutting issues between and among the main themes, which are:

- Economy
- Natural Resources
- Human Development
- Governance
- Peace and Security
- Culture and Participation

Dr Amoako and I have been assigned the "Governance" theme and work is progressing well since the Commission was launched on May 4, 2004 in London. The issues being addressed include the legislature, judiciary, role and independence of the press, public finances (efficiency, transparency and accountability), state owned enterprises, the role of independent economic policy analysis and evaluation institutions. The other Commissioners are making appreciable progress on their assignments, and the report should be ready in May 2005, as scheduled.

I hasten to add that many of the problems Africa faces are known; for instance, they include trade protectionism of rich countries, low volumes of relatively ineffective aid, problems of service delivery and governance, diseases and civil strife. It is about time that Africans believe and act in accordance with the saying, "charity begins at home", and take the lead in confronting the continent's ills. After all, we know what went wrong with our past developmental endeavours, and we also know and generally agree on what ought to be done. What appears to be lacking is the will to implement policies that have proved to be effective in bringing about appreciable socio-economic transformation in other parts of the world. It is an undeniable fact that if there is no good governance, resources are wasted; if there is fiscal indiscipline and inflation is rampant, economic progress will be retarded; if there is environmental degradation, food production is seriously compromised. The Commission should contribute towards a successful implementation of the policies and reforms aimed at redressing the problems, thus eventually restoring Africa to a place of dignity in the family of nations.

This Press Conference and the visit of Mr Wickstead form part of the Commission's work programme. Other elements of the work programme include attendance and participation at relevant meetings and/or fora, and these are used to obtain information from stakeholders on each of the topics. Dr Amoako and I took advantage of the annual meetings of the African Development Bank held in Kampala (Uganda) in May and the Africa Economic Forum which was held in Maputo (Mozambique) in June, by addressing and exchanging views at plenary sessions and press conferences on the work of the Commission.

There is also constant dialogue with the Commission Secretariat and Prime Minister Blair's office on matters of mutual interest, and all the Commissioners are scheduled to meet in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) next month (October 7 – 8, 2004) to consolidate their work and further the course of the Commission.

In its work, the Commission is assisted by a dedicated team of experts and professionals at the Secretariat in London, with Mr Wickstead at its helm. I now wish to invite Mr Wickstead to elaborate on what the Commission for Africa is all about, following which you may wish to seek clarification on any points raised.