



ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE W. BALDWIN SPENCER, PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA AND CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FOLLOW-UP AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, 10 June 2008)

Your Excellency Laurent Gbagbo,
President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Invited Guest
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. In my capacity as Chair of the Group of 77 and China, I would like to welcome all of you warmly to Yamoussoukro and to express to the Government and the people of Côte d'Ivoire our deep appreciation for their warm welcome and hospitality.
 2. Allow me to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Laurent Gbagbo, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire for his able leadership in promoting South-South solidarity and furthering the interests and aspirations of our Group from our common values of unity and solidarity.
 3. I would like also to welcome warmly all delegations who accepted the invitation to join us at this historic gathering which takes place against the backdrop of preparations for the High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation.
- Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
4. The world has undergone major economic and political transformation in the last two decades. The changes, particularly in the South, have been more rapid than at any time during a similar span in world history. Relationships within the South and between the South and the North have taken on entirely new dimensions. New patterns of trade, investment and other economic linkages among the countries of the global South are emerging rapidly.
 5. During the past 20 years, developing countries have accumulated varying degrees of development capacities which have enhanced the general sense of confidence in self-reliance and interdependence among countries of the South. The concept of South-South Cooperation has emerged as a sense of political solidarity and economic cooperation which, if adequately harnessed, will contribute greatly to the development of the South.

6. These new South-South dynamics have not only enhanced the general sense of confidence in self-development in the more successful countries, but also contextualized the aspirations for interdependence among all developing countries in an entirely different economic context. It is

important to note that South-South cooperation is not aid. It is an expression of South-South solidarity and promotion of two-way learning and cooperation based on true partnership for mutual development.

7. The existing international development cooperation architecture is obviously built, conceptually, structurally, institutionally and operationally, to primarily support North-South cooperation and aid flows. In the absence of enlightened re-thinking and restructuring, this existing architecture will remain inadequate in responding to the new Southern dynamics, thus falling short of helping to realize the full potential of South-South cooperation, including triangular cooperation for development.

8. The rapid economic growth of some major developing countries has, indeed, dramatically improved the development prospects of neighboring countries, spurring economic growth, intra-South trade and investment, as well as technology transfer and exchanges. Today, all of the 130 member countries of the Group of 77 and China, regardless of their size or level of development, have accumulated varying degrees of capacities and experiences in development that can be shared on a South-South basis. Many of our countries have developed long-term strategies for inclusive growth and development that can be made available for intra-South peer learning and demand-based application.

9. It is also clear that South-South cooperation cannot replace North-South cooperation, and should not replace North-South cooperation. As our Group has emphasized on many occasions, the North has an obligation, both in their own national interests, but also in the interest of global harmony and equity and development, to fulfill their commitments through North-South cooperation. South-South cooperation, whether through the UN - bilaterally or regionally - is not intended to replace cooperation with the North. The premises are different, the conditions are different, and the expectations are different, which must be reflected accordingly.

10. Regional and international initiatives aimed at promoting cooperation in strategic areas should be encouraged, as should the strengthening of the existing multilateral funding mechanisms for South-South cooperation. In this context we must agree at this historical session to operationalize the South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance established by the Second South Summit in Doha in order to respond to the new challenges faced by developing countries today including natural disasters which have affected recently some developing countries hunger and poverty as well as the global food crisis. I do believe strongly that the time has come after three years to act urgently in order to make the Fund a reality.

11. Food production has become a security issue; this poses a threat for the development of our countries. There is also the negative impacts' stemming from the reduction of agricultural fields and a simultaneously growing demand for food and thus the increase of food prices. We must carefully consider the impact which these repercussions of actions on the management of the food crises will have on our biodiversity and our development.

12. According to the FAO, 37 countries are currently threatened by the food crisis. Studies suggest that prices will remain high in the next ten years and threaten to become a major source of global, social and at times political instability. This will inevitably create economic hardship especially for the 800 million people already suffering from hunger.

13. The quantity of food aid should not be artificially lowered by those who give. Furthermore, combined public and private investment in agricultural development is necessary to build the necessary infrastructure including roads, storage facilities as well as develop capacity for water

management and research. The time has come for us to act urgently in order to make the South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance a reality.

14. I also would like to emphasize that we must make full use of modern information technologies to promote South-South cooperation. We must be made much more aware and conscious of each other, of our languages and cultures, of our needs and requirements, of our problems and sensitivities, of our assets and potentialities. This information should be produced by us and as far as possible transmitted through our own channels. Indeed, the importance of creating wide public awareness about South-South cooperation is becoming increasingly evident. Our mass media has an important role to play and should be encouraged to do so. We have to make South-South cooperation comprehensive to our people and it must receive their enthusiastic support. It is not only we, as leaders, but our people as a whole who must think South-South and act energetically and with enthusiasm in doing so.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. As we prepare for the High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation early next year to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, the Group must take the lead today in this transformation by adopting the Development platform for the South which was concluded recently in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, with the participation of eminent personalities from the South who have contributed substantively in this process since the Second South Summit in 2005. This reference document should be used as an instrument for international cooperation, including South-South cooperation; asserting pressure on donor countries to honor their ODA commitments rather than using South-South cooperation to supplement North-South flows, and helping to reshape the international economic architecture.

16. In this context, I would like to place on record my deep appreciation and sincere thanks to the Hon. P.J Patterson, former Prime Minister of Jamaica and Chair of the G-77 for 2005, as well as Her Excellency Chandrika Kumaratunge, former President of Sri Lanka, and other distinguished members of the Panel who contributed successfully in the elaboration of the Platform. Let me acknowledge His Excellency Milos Alcaly of Venezuela, former Chairman of G-77 and China for 2002 as well as Her Excellency Ambassador Samira Hanna-El-Dahe of Lebanon, former Chairperson of G-77 and China for 2006 in the Paris Chapter, who have joined us today as members of the Panel to present the Development Platform for its adoption. Let me also acknowledge Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, for his valuable contribution as a member of the Panel of Eminent Personalities and for his vision in leading the preparatory process for the High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation to be held in 2009.

17. There is tremendous potential that can be unleashed through cooperative initiatives for trade, investment, and economic cooperation. We must develop systems and arrangements to enable the private sector, the academic institutions and the NGOs to effectively participate and contribute to development, including youth employment. We also need to organize regular forums for inclusive dialogue on key development issues involving local authorities and other stakeholders.

18. The need of the South for institution building to promote sectoral cooperation remains a crucial part of our agenda in the South Summit outcomes. The forthcoming sectoral conferences to be held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic next October on sports, culture and development, as well

as the ministerial forum on water to be held in Muscat, Oman in February 2009, will contribute to strengthening further South-South cooperation. In this context, I would like, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, to pay a warm tribute to the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation at the UNDP for its continued valuable support to the work of the Group of 77 in achieving its objectives for South-South cooperation.

19. In conclusion, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the local authorities of Yamoussoukro for the warm welcome and hospitality, particularly His Excellency Mr. Apollinaire N'DRI, Governor of Yamoussoukro. My thanks also go to His Excellency Mr. Zakaria Fellah, Coordinator of the National Organizing Committee of IFCC, as well as to Dr. Mourad Ahmia, our Executive Secretary and the secretariat team for their valuable support provided in the preparations and organization of this important conference. Finally, words of appreciation to Ambassador John W. Ashe, our Permanent Representative in New York, and his competent team for their valuable contribution in this process.

20. Once again, a warm welcome to all of you in Yamoussoukro and my best wishes for a successful outcome of our deliberations.

Thank you.