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Kofi Annan: The next generation must drive Africa's renaissance

Former UN Secretary-General marks the Golden Jubilee by highlighting the immense opportunities for Africa today, both at home and abroad

Yaoundé - In a keynote address today, Kofi A. Annan will congratulate the seventeen nations celebrating fifty years of independence this year, and call on the next generation of leaders to take on the challenge of driving Africa's progress.

During the speech to 'Africa 21', a two-day conference hosted by President Biya in Cameroon to mark the anniversary, Annan will speak of his own experience of the remarkable economic, political and social progress achieved within his lifetime. But he will also focus firmly on the future, setting out a robust call for Africa's leaders, citizens and partners to increase efforts to realise the continent's potential.

Describing Africa as a "sleeping giant about to be awoken", Annan will say that opportunities today abound in terms of economic growth, development, social progress and the continent's strategic place in the world. But he will warn these will not be realised automatically, stating: "We cannot take further progress for granted. We need to work hard for it. It is strong leadership and good governance that will make the difference, both at home and on the global stage."

Annan will say that:

- **Despite progress in the quality of African governance, there is still a long way to go:** "We need to see the fulfilment of commitments in our national constitutions and in the AU Constitutive Act, promises kept on good governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Across the continent, civil society needs to be given more space and rights to be able to hold leaders accountable for their actions and make an essential contribution to nation-building efforts".
- **We must see greater transparency in the way governments manage revenues, particularly those from the extraction of natural resources:** These revenues "must be turned into results for all citizens, not just the elite few". Africa's leaders must manage partnerships with investors, particularly

from the global south, in a way that is “mutually beneficial and generates tangible and lasting benefits for their citizens”.

- **Africa must focus on consolidating and enhancing regional integration and cooperation:** “Africa’s international competitiveness and ability to meet its trade potential depend on much greater economies of scale, and improvements in transport, energy and communications infrastructure”.
- **The African Development Bank and the African Union need to be strengthened:** We need an “African agenda driven by strong African financial, economic and political institutions. There is great scope for more concerted action to ensure that Africa’s place in the global decision-making fora is secured and that its voice is heard”.

As we mark the Golden Jubilee, Annan will say that there is cause for celebration, and much more than many outside commentators are ready to acknowledge. The challenges for the continent remain great, but the many success stories of the last decades have proven rapid progress is possible. Concluding on an optimistic note, the former UN Secretary-General will say:

“This, and the extraordinary talent and energy of Africa’s people, and the impatience of the younger generation to transform the quality of life and assert Africa’s place in the world, gives me the confidence that the next fifty years will be even better than the last. It is the next generation of leaders that must pick up the challenge. From what I have seen on my travels throughout the continent, they are well up to the task. We just need to give them a chance”.

– **Ends** –

Contact

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Notes to Editors:

- Kofi A. Annan will deliver the address entitled ‘Championing Africa’s Renaissance’ at ‘Africa21’, a two-day international conference held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on the initiative of President Paul Biya to celebrate the 2010 Golden Jubilee of the independence of 17 African countries. It will bring together policy-makers, the private sector, and experts, representatives of international organisations and civil society, from Africa and around the world. For more information please visit: <http://www.yaoundeconference-africa21.org/en/node>
- Kofi A. Annan served two terms, from 1997 to 2006, as UN Secretary-General. In 2001, Annan and the United Nations were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. Since leaving the United Nations, Annan has established a Foundation through which he continues to provide leadership on critical global issues, particularly preserving and building peace and facilitating more equitable sharing of the benefits of globalization, by promoting poverty alleviation, good governance, human rights and the rule of law. Please visit: www.kofiannanfoundation.org
- Mr. Annan currently serves as the Chair of the Africa Progress Panel (APP). The Panel monitors and promotes mutual accountability and shared responsibility for progress in Africa. Its three focus areas are economic and political governance; finance for sustainable development, including ODA; and MDG achievement – notably in light of climate change. The work of the Panel aims to track progress and draw attention to critical issues and opportunities for progress in Africa. For more information please visit: www.africaprogresspanel.org
- Please note the Africa Progress Panel will publish its annual report analysing and setting recommendations for the continent’s progress at a press conference in Johannesburg on 25 May 2010. For more information please contact hannah.mccullagh@portland-communications.com