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## Kofi Annan: “Africa must take greater responsibility for its own problems and solutions”

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**Former UN Secretary-General hails progress and calls for confidence and leadership to make this “Africa’s century”**

*Nigeria, Friday 20 March 2009* - Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan today urged Africa to take greater responsibility for its own problems and solutions. In a speech to mark the centenary of the birth of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Mr. Annan set out his vision of how African nations can address the challenges and opportunities they face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Praising Chief Obafemi Awolowo as an “outstanding son of both Nigeria and Africa”, Kofi Annan reflected on how far Africa has come towards fulfilling his ambition of a “peaceful and progressive continent”, two decades after his death.

In a wide-ranging speech, Kofi Annan said:

- **There has been real, significant and widespread progress in many African countries, but not enough:** The number of conflicts across Africa has fallen sharply, democracy is on the move, Africa’s economies have been performing strongly, and the number of people living in poverty has declined. But “on peace and security, economic and social development and governance and human rights – the three inter-connected pillars on which Africa’s continued progress rests – there is still much to be done.” The continent also faces “new and serious threats which risk undermining all that has been achieved so far”, not least the impact of the global financial crisis and climate change.
- **Africa deserves the help of the international community to overcome these challenges, but must also work harder to put its own house in order:** Africa must move beyond divisions on ethnic and tribal lines. “The cloak of government must protect all. Inequalities based on ethnic background are the fault lines on which societies fracture. **There must be**



Kofi Annan  
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- equal access to opportunity for all.** Healing these divisions needs good, democratic leadership and strong civil societies. We need a much greater effort both nationally – and with international support – to build up the strength of our institutions and civil society”.
- **Political leaders across the continent must recognise that democracy means they can be voted out as well as into power:** “It is a profound shame that since independence so many of Africa’s leaders, once elected, come to believe that only they can be trusted to run their countries. The result, all too quickly, becomes Government for the benefit of a ruling elite rather than society as a whole”.
  - **Africa must ensure that its natural wealth is used to improve the health and strength of their societies:** “For too many countries in Africa, natural resources have not been a boon but a curse. We must see much greater transparency in the revenue which Governments receive from the extraction of natural resources and how the money is spent. African leaders must also work harder to ensure the continent’s natural wealth is not simply siphoned off by other countries”.
  - **In too many places in Africa, human rights are disregarded, the rule of law ignored and the culture of impunity embedded:** “It is a major step in tackling this culture that we are seeing Special Tribunals holding to account politicians and rebel commanders from Liberia, DRC, Sudan, and Uganda for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those who criticize the International Criminal Court for seemingly concentrating on Africa seem to ignore the scale and the severity of the crimes that have taken place on the continent. They also fail to recognise that it is the people of these countries themselves who have called for justice against those responsible for their suffering”.
  - **Africa must take a greater responsibility for its own problems and solutions:** “The African Union is increasingly influential and important. But both the AU and Nigeria can, and must, do more. Across the continent there is huge potential for increased regional and sub-regional co-operation not least to improve infrastructure, boost trade and create jobs. Africa would be in a stronger position to demand and win the changes needed in international organisations if it showed the courage and will to tackle problems within our own continent”.



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**Notes to Editors**

- Kofi Annan delivered the lecture at an event hosted by the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation. The lecture entitled 'Africa in the 21st century: challenges and opportunities' begins a year-long programme of celebrations to mark the centenary of the birth of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, which took place on 6 March 2009. The lecture was delivered at The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos.