



**FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF CAMEROON**

“L’ AFRIQUE, UNE CHANCE POUR LE MONDE, REALITES ET DEFIS”
CONFERENCE INTERNATIONALE DE YAOUNDE (18 – 19 Mai, 2010)

SALUTATION:

Your Excellency: Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon,

Your Excellency, the First Lady of the Republic of Cameroon,

Your Excellencies: Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of other Heads of State,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you all warm felicitations and greetings from His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI; and on his behalf, I wish to heartily and sincerely congratulate Your Excellency, President Biya, and the people of Cameroon on your fiftieth anniversary of independence. The Holy Father still cherishes fond memories of his visit to this land last June. He recalls fondly the gracious hospitality and the warmth of affection of this government and its people, his encounter with the diplomats in this land and his memorable celebration of the Christian faith with the faithful of Cameroon in the Ahmadou Ahidjo stadium in Douala. At that celebration, the Holy Father observed the depth of faith (in the sacred) with which the people worshipped God and the shared joy which united people from within and lead them to a communal praise of God: a praise which, at the same, time inspired love of neighbor and mutual responsibility. And now, as such a people of faith celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of their independence, the Holy Father joins them in their prayers of gratitude to God for how far He has brought this great and promising nation in these fifty years of independence, and he commends the government and the people of Cameroon prayerfully to God for his abundant blessings, his guidance and his care as this nation faces its future of good governance, prosperous growth and peace.

50TH ANNIVERSARY PROJECT: “AFRICA AS OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WORLD”

Mr. President, it has been the wish of your government and people to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of this land with a special study session. With sixteen other countries in Africa celebrating their independence this year with Cameroon, your government and people, in a generous display of magnanimity, have chosen to consider the pan-African significance of these independence celebrations. Against the background of Cameroon’s own particular history and experience of independence, your government and people wish to set out to consider the reality and the challenges of Africa being an “*opportunity for the world*”. Under the theme: “*L’Afrique, une chance pour le monde. Réalités et défis*”, you have convoked this distinguished assembly of seasoned and erudite statesmen, diplomats and scholars to study and to reflect deeply on Africa’s place and experience in the world, the challenges facing her as well as her opportunities. It is hoped that this study session will lead to the description of a new trajectory along which Africa can travel in its post-independence history to make real for its populations opportunities of good governance, economic stability and growth, poverty eradication, disease control and access to health care, food security and peace in an increasingly globalizing world.

Indeed, when in 1999, President Bill Clinton visited Ghana, the *Herald Tribune* wrote: “*We have been told that Clinton is coming to change the way Americans think about Africa, from a continent of despair to a place of opportunity and hope*”. Similarly, proceedings at the G-8 meeting in L’Aquila, Italy, last July (2009) led observers also to describe Africa as a continent of opportunity for the world, in view of which the rest of the world had to change its way of looking at Africa. As a journalist of an Italian Newspaper put it then: “*Non è più il tempo di colpire lo stomaco dei lettori, cercando di emozionarli con immagini della morte e della fame. Non è servito a molto in questi anni. Dobbiamo parlare al cervello..... e spiegare che è una opportunità per tutti che l’Africa si sviluppi: sarebbe una soluzione per l’economia, la sicurezza e l’ambiente*”.¹ Here it was not just Africa which was considered an opportunity for the world. It was rather **Africa’s development** which would make it an opportunity for the world.

The basic challenges then facing Africa are clear:

- It is how to make the people of Africa also see the opportunities which outsiders describe in her.
- It is still more importantly how the people of the continent can make the God-given opportunities and endowments real and obtainable for themselves.

Pope Benedict XVI posed these same challenges to the people of the continent during his visit to this land and to Angola just last year by addressing the several factors which oppose and compromise Africa’s development. During his welcome speech to the airport in Luanda, the Holy Father reminded the Angolans: “*Votre territoire est riche; votre nation est forte*”, *utilisez ces atouts pour favoriser la paix et l’entente entre les peuples, sur une base de loyauté et d’égalité capable de promouvoir en Afrique l’avenir pacifique et solidaire auquel tous aspirent et auquel tous ont droit. Pour cela, je vous en prie, ne vous laissez pas prendre par la loi du plus fort! Car Dieu a accordé aux homes le pouvoir de s’élever avec les ailes de la raison et de la foi, au-dessus de leurs inclinations naturelles. Si vous vous laissez emporter sur ces ailes, il ne vous sera pas difficile alors de reconnaître dans l’autre un frère , né avec les mêmes droits humains*

¹ *La Stampa*, Domenica 5 Luglio 2009, pg.3. “It is no longer time to hit the stomach of readers looking for excitement with images of death and hunger. It did not do much in recent years. We need to talk to the brain and explain that it is an opportunity for all that Africa will develop: it would be a solution for the economy, safety and environment”. (Free translation).

fondamentaux”.² Later, in meeting with political and civil authorities and the diplomatic corps, the Holy Father, seeing this moment as the time for Africa to be a continent of hope, exhorted his audience: “*Chers amis, avec un Cœur intègre, magnanime et plein de compassion, vous pouvez transformer ce continent, en le conduisant sur le chemin indiqué par le principes indispensable à tout démocratie civile modern: le respect et la promotion des droits de l’homme, un gouvernement transparent, une magistrature indépendante, des moyens de communication sociale libres, un réseau d’écoles et d’hôpitaux fonctionnant de façon adéquate, ...*”.

The Pope’s reminder to the Angolans and to all Africans that “*Dieu a accordé aux homes le pouvoir de s’élever avec les ailes de raison et de la foi au-dessus de leurs inclinations naturelles*”, is very significant; and it ties in with his presentation of the vocation of every person to self transcendence and to self development. For progress, as integral human development is the vocation of every person. This vocation to progress “*drives us to do more, know more and have more in order to be more*,”³ and this means that development must be integral: it must promote the good of every person and of the whole person. It means the promotion of the advancement of all men and of the whole man;⁴ and man cannot fail to open himself to the divine vocation to pursue his own development.

This is how the Holy Father develops the theme of human development in his latest encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. Flying also on the same wing of reason and faith, the Holy Father treats the ultimate issue at the heart of this study session, namely, the development of the human person in Africa. For, by reason of his creation in the image and likeness of God, man cannot fail to open himself to the divine vocation to pursue his own development. It may sound unusual to some of you that the Holy Father speaks of human development as a vocation; but that is what it is. It means that it is both the desire and the design of God that man (and woman), yes, the African man too (and woman) becomes the protagonist of his development. And if it is a vocation, then it is ungodly and a neglect for Africa to fail to assume responsibility for its development.

In this sense, this study session can benefit a lot from the encyclical: *Caritas in veritate*.

AFRICA’S ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURE FOR OPPORTUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT.

Happily, the onset of the third millennium appeared to have coincided with an emerging continental desire on the part of African leaders themselves for a new Africa. A new breed of African leaders dreamt of a new Africa and wanted to spearhead Africa’s response to her vocation to pursue her own development. Thabo Mbeki of South Africa’s ANC party, for example, believed that “*there was an African renaissance on the way which would change both the perception and the reality of Africa’s drive towards modernization and prosperity*”, and that “*it required renewal of our values and re-definition of our methods*”.

From more than half way across the continent, in Ghana, another politician and a minister of Foreign Affairs (Nana Akuffo-Addo) would echo the sentiments of Mbeki, claiming that there was “*a new contemporary African self-assertion to build an African civilization which would be*

² Pape Benoît XVI, Discours, Cérémonie de bienvenue, Aéroport International de Luanda, Vendredi 20 Mars 2009.

³ *Caritas in Veritate*, 18.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

responsive to the dictates of our times, namely, economic prosperity, political freedom and social solidarity”.

These sentiments and many more were the precursors of the thought currents and ideas which fuelled the formulation of **NEPAD**. African political leaders, it appeared, were determined to change the face of the political administration on the continent. They spearheaded, accordingly, a critical self-appraisal of Africa, which identified poor and bad governance on the continent as a cause of Africa’s poverty. They charted a path of good governance, accountability and transparency, and adopted a framework that would guide performance, and set the tone for Africa’s renewal through transparent political leadership.

This strategic framework is “*the New Partnership for Africa’s Development*” (**NEPAD**). It has received worldwide recognition and applause; and it is extolled as a “*development framework*”, fashioned by Africans to guide Africa’s emergence from poverty, and its attainment of the “*millennium development goals*”.

AFRICA’S ARCHITECTURE OF OPPORTUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: INDEPENDENCE, PARTNERSHIP AND SOLIDARITY

The implementation of Africa’s architecture of opportunity and development by independent sovereign states in the globalized setting of our world makes solidarity and the creation of partnerships indispensable. Thus, a critical dimension, indeed, of Africans taking responsibility for the continent’s destiny is the need to negotiate partnerships and new relationships with partners.

Nepad and the G8:

Accordingly, in July 2001, **NEPAD** was presented, as the *New African Initiative* to the G8 leaders at Genoa. These committed themselves to preparing a *G8 Action Plan*. Such an action plan was endorsed at the G8 summit at Kananaski, Canada (in the presence of the former UN Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and four of the five African initiators).

The aim of the *G8 Africa Action Plan* was neither to provide a massive infusion of funding nor to underwrite **NEPAD**. It was to put in place a new partnership that will unlock much greater resources, both public and private. Trade and investment were to be favoured over loans and grant, through deregulation, removal of controls, and creating an appropriate investment climate.

Nepad and the EU:

The five president initiators of **NEPAD** presented it in October 2001 to the EU at Brussels. EU issued a common statement expressing strong support for the African initiative, especially for the political values at the heart of **NEPAD** and its commitment to poverty eradication, and provided a follow-up mechanism to focus on capacity-building and infrastructure.

EU agreed to contribute to the implementation of **NEPAD** in selected areas after the Kananaski Agreement between the G 8 and the African leaders:

- promoting peace and security

- strengthening institutions and governance
- fostering trade, investment, economic growth and sustainable development
- implementing debt relief
- expanding knowledge and improving and promoting education, and expanding digital opportunities
- improving health and confronting HIV-Aids
- increasing agricultural productivity
- improving water resource management,

The *NEPAD – EU*, and the *NEPAD – G8* agreements reflect Africa’s appeal to EU and G8 sense of solidarity and a common appreciation of human values, especially, the *universal destination of the goods of the earth*; but the agreements fall short of true *partnership*. The EU and the G 8 are not yet sitting tight around the table, so that Africa can find a place on it.

In partnership, all remain open to all. It is not normally a one-sided tutelage or a one-way traffic of services. But when the partners are of unequal stature (economically, politically etc.), as the case is between independent African states and their external partners, then partnership can only be a show of *solidarity* and *altruism*, through which the weak is empowered, the poor enriched, the feeble strengthened and the voiceless given advocacy. Partnership, in this case, is also inspired by the *principle of gratuitousness* and the *logic of gift* as an expression of **solidarity** and **fraternity**.⁵

Here too, the encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, challenges the prevailing attitude of evaluating all partnerships between nations and groups according to the principles of interest and gain; and proposes, as more humane and ethical, the principle of **gratuitousness** and **love**.

THE HUMAN FAMILY AND THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT:

The biblical affirmation of God’s lordship over history, the cosmos and all that there is, has a corollary affirmation, which is the common divine authorship of humanity, and hence, the unity of the human family, despite its diversity. God’s action, then, embraces the whole world and the entire human family, for whom his work of creation is destined (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* #428).

Thus, humanity (man), for whom God’s work of creation is destined, is created within a context, an integral part of which are those of living spaces that ensure his freedom (ie. *the garden*), various possibilities for food (ie. *the trees of the garden*), work (ie. *the command to till earth*), and above all community (ie. *the gift of someone like himself*). Obviously, these conditions that ensure the fullness of human life are the object of a divine blessing (according to the Old Testament); and with them God wants to guarantee that man has what is necessary for his growth, his freedom of expression, success in his work, and a wealth of human relationship.

From this sketch about man’s place in creation, one may conclude to the following:

⁵⁵ *Caritas in veritate*, 36.

- The unity of origin of the human family
- Its shared destiny
- Equality between every person and every community
- The universal destination of the goods of the earth
- The centrality of the person and Solidarity.

From these observations about the human family, the *development* of the human person is not only an aspiration; it is a **right**, a right which implies a **duty**. In this sense, Pope John Paul II would say: “Collaboration in the development of the whole person and every human being is in fact a duty of *all towards all*, and must be shared by the four parts of the earth: East and West, North and South” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 32).

Indeed, the attainment of the common good has become a goal that is beyond the reach of individual States, even if they are dominant in terms of power, wealth, and political strength (cfr. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, 442). There is interdependence among men and nations, and the obligation to cooperate for attaining the common good. Governments and international agencies, therefore, must guarantee the attainment of that equality which is the basis of the right of all to participate in the process of full development, duly respecting not only legitimate differences (cfr. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42), but also agreements of cooperation reached. Such agreements of cooperation should not only protect interests and profits, and be guided by strict market mentality; they should have regard for the duty to solidarity, justice and universal charity.

Peter K. A. Cardinal Turkson

President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace