

STATEMENT AT THE

**JOINT ACTION FORUM OF THE AFRICAN PROGRAMME FOR
ONCHOCERCIASIS CONTROL (APOC)**

Donald KABERUKA
President, African Development Bank

Tunis, Tuesday 8th December 2009

Excellencies

Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

1. ***Mine is a brief duty to welcome you to our Temporary Relocation Agency in Tunis, and I have the pleasure to do so on behalf of the Bank Group. It is a singular honour for the ADB to be hosting for the first time, the Joint Action Forum of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control. Let me join others in paying homage to Bob McNamara for the vision and leadership he brought to fighting river blindness in Africa.***

2. ***Our mission is to fight poverty. Poverty is above all, disempowerment, and there is no greater disempowerment than being blind, deprived of ability to see by a disease – which science and mankind know how to deal with.***

3. ***As the world meets in Copenhagen to try and save our planet from global warming, we Africans are particularly concerned about adaptation to the impact of climate change. One of such impacts is the re-emergence of diseases we believed had come under control, or disease patterns which have or are changing.***

Many of them will be water or vector borne diseases probably neglected diseases, further demanding imagination and determination from us. Only a few weeks back I was visited by a team working on combating tsetse flies, and sleeping sickness, another programme we support.

- 4. The African Development Bank Group has been supporting onchocerciasis control since the operation was launched in 1975. Recognizing the battle is not yet fully won, our Board of Directors on 15 July 2008 approved funding to the tune of about 23 million dollars to strengthen the programme's achievements and especially finalize the disengagement process and the devolution of activities to countries themselves. In addition, thanks to this funding, gender issues will be better addressed particularly in terms of improved services for women, a core element for sustainability.*

- 5. I am told these activities will be implemented in 16 out of 19 African countries where onchocerciasis remains endemic. We very much commend your strategic approach of mobilizing local communities concerned and the participation of NGOs; these key elements are crucial to activity sustainability and consolidation.*

6. *I welcome very much the theme chosen this year namely: Neglected Tropical Diseases. Millions of Africans and other poor people in low income countries continue to suffer scourges of diseases which are, so to speak, orphans of R & D and neglected when priorities are being set for resource allocation. I want to commend individuals, many in this room, men and women the world over, organizations, private firms, who have continued to afford attention to those diseases. My presence here today is a symbol and testimony of the Bank's support and my personal salute to you.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. *Let our collective commitment help to overcome this scourge of onchocerciasis and save 70 million Africans from the risk of permanently losing their sight and thereby their ability to fend for themselves and remaining mired in poverty.*
8. *Once again, let me welcome you to Tunis and thank you for making the journey.*
9. *Together, "we can make Africa an Onchocerciasis-free continent".*

Thank you for your kind attention and I declare your deliberations open.

