African Youth
Its Vitality,
Its Creativity,
Its Aspirations

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First, I would like to express my optimism regarding the progress made by the African countries during the current decade, which augurs well for a better future for their populations and youth in particular. Indeed, during this decade Africa has been characterized by steadily rising economic growth, enhanced governance, fewer conflicts and greater democratic change and transparency.

The year 2005 has been particularly rich in events for the African continent. Here I wish to underscore the interest shown in Africa by its development partners. The replenishment of the resources of the African Development Fund to a record level of 5.4 billion dollars for the 2005-2007 period, the Report of the Commission for Africa, which proposes the doubling of Official Development Assistance, the G8 Debt Cancellation Initiative, the United Nations Millennium +5 Summit and the establishment of the Africa Infrastructure Consortium, the secretariat of which is hosted by the Bank, are all indicators of the renewed interest in the African continent.

To sustain progress made in each country and benefit fully from the initiatives of the international community, African youth will have to play a pivotal role. However, a feeling of exclusion has been created by a lack of employment opportunities and poor prospects for the young. For most young people, the future is one of uncertainty and insecurity. This is exacerbated by the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which excludes a significant proportion of the young population from the development process.

Youths and children are also the actors and targets of armed conflicts. In this respect, the persistence of child trafficking and child soldiers constitute real scourges. Similarly, the youth of our continent continue to face the challenges of access to basic social services and participation in the development process.

The many constraints mentioned above also impact on the migration of young people and the brain drain to other continents. Here, the figures speak for themselves. In fact, the African Capacity Building Foundation estimates that approximately 20,000 African experts emigrate every year. Africa is losing its skilled workforce owing to its inability to reward talent, retain skilled manpower and make proper use of it. As long as strong economies – characterized in particular by the emergence of a dynamic private sector, capable of absorbing African expertise – are not in place, it would be illusory to expect its return.

Furthermore, in the education sector – the main source of knowledge and for the mastery of science and technology – there is a mismatch between the courses offered and labour market requirements. The digital divide has become one of the major concerns of the international community for it excludes part of the world’s
youth from new information technologies which are now the best means of disseminating know-how and acquiring knowledge.

We must dialogue with our youth to find appropriate solutions for the majority of young people who are becoming increasingly impoverished every day. We must draw on its creativity to enable our countries to fully benefit from the positive synergies of globalization.

Indeed, for the African continent, in particular for its youth, globalization implies more openness to trade and technological progress. It assumes continuing adaptation to change and the constant quest for innovation and competitiveness. Technological innovation plays a critical role in the development process, more than the availability of primary commodities. It requires new kinds of relationships involving, among others, a successful process for the transfer of technologies, the capacity to take ownership of discoveries and a gradual opening up of economies. This also requires the strengthening of higher education and scientific research institutions.

The report of the Commission for Africa estimates that the international community will have to invest approximately 500 million dollars per year over the next five years to revitalize higher education institutions in Africa. Furthermore, the Commission recommends the mobilization over 10 years of three billion dollars to set up centres of excellence in science and technology. These investments, when realized, will lead to the creation of fresh opportunities for young people to participate in the economic development of their countries.

In its activities, the Bank has always focused on projects and programmes that are in keeping with education, population and gender policies which prioritize the integration of young people. It is actively working to promote the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in respect of universal primary education and, more particularly, to correct the boy-girl disparity.

In the years ahead, the Bank will prioritize science and technology in its interventions. It will work with the African Union, NEPAD and the ECA as well as the regional and sub-regional institutions to strengthen and establish institutions with a view to narrowing the scientific gap between Africa and the rest of the world. It will also seek to create science and technology centres of excellence, the objectives of which would be to develop infrastructure, strengthen research and development and promote innovation through a public-private partnership.

Education and training are necessary to give momentum to the development process. However, the countries will have to persevere in the reforms to improve
on their economic performances of the past few years. By removing the constraints on the development of regional and South-South trade, and stepping up regional economic integration efforts, African countries will be able to benefit from economies of scale.

They will thus be able to offer young people the opportunities provided by broader regional and world markets. In this respect, I hope that the Doha negotiations will lead to the establishment of a more open world trade system capable of enhancing the prospects for growth and employment. The dismantling of trade barriers and the abolition of subsidies, which create trade distortions, particularly in the agricultural sector, will improve the commercial opportunities available to African countries.

These different actions should make it possible to build stronger economies, characterized in particular by the emergence of a dynamic private sector, in order to better integrate youth, develop their potential and thus reverse the current brain drain.

In conclusion, Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, I can assure you that, more than ever, the Bank is ready to back the initiatives of our young people and to support our countries in their development efforts.

I remain convinced that the initiatives stemming from your conference will lead to the formulation of a strategy which will ensure a better future for our African youth.

Thank you.