Remarks to the AfDB Staff Reception

Dr. Donald Kaberuka
President
This occasion has always been a treasured tradition – that unique moment when the entire AfDB family comes together in communion at the beginning of each year. For reasons very familiar to you, for the past three years, we have been regrettably unable to do so. In fact the last time was January 2010. We have always been looking forward to the day when conditions are right for this, our grand family, our community to get together once more at the beginning of the year. I am glad that tonight we are able to do so.

I therefore want – in the name of the Board of Directors, Senior Management and in my own name – to greet you all very warmly. From wherever you are, in Tunis, in the field offices, or on external assignments I want you to know how pleased I am that we can find this occasion to be together physically or in spirit.

On this occasion, we in particular remember our colleagues and friends who departed the world and we pray for their souls to rest in peace.

The first thing I wish to do – although it may be late in the day – is to extend to all of you my very best wishes for 2013. To each one of you, your families here and abroad, let it be a year of good health as well as personal and professional fulfillment.

Let me, in particular and on your behalf, extend my greetings and best wishes to the People of Tunisia who have been our hosts for the past 10 years. As they continue to navigate a complex transition they know they have our good wishes for success. From the very first day of this process the African Development Bank has been, and will continue to be, on their side.

I am also not forgetting the People of the Ivory Coast – our headquarters – as they continue the process of national reconciliation and reconstruction after the troubled years.

Let the Year 2013, for all the member countries of the Bank be one of peace and prosperity.

In 2012, Africa, our beloved continent, continued to make good progress despite the very difficult international conditions. But Africa has also traversed some very difficult moments in different regions: in North Africa, in the Sahel, in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere. However, we remain confident that we can look forward with optimism to the coming months.

The first thing I would like to say to you tonight is to express a word of appreciation for your continued dedication to our work, to our mission, sometimes under very difficult and uncertain conditions. The People of Africa are eternally grateful to you
for your commitment, your understanding of the challenges and your resilience in continuing to provide them with first-class services in challenging times.

I want to render a special homage to the families, spouses, partners, children and extended family here today. The success and achievements of the African Development Bank are very much yours. As part of this rich multicultural organization with so many backgrounds which together make up the mosaic of the African Development Bank, we are indebted to each one of you here and the support you provide.

A large proportion of our staff has joined the Bank in recent years, some to a new culture, a new environment, or even at moments of upheavals. It is only natural that there may have been moments of uncertainty and concern for your safety and welfare of families. I want to take the opportunity tonight to say to you: please rest assured that in both good times and in challenging ones your well-being, your security and your welfare are paramount, whether you are in Tunis or in a field office.

At no time will that be compromised. We are always ready for any eventuality. I know that at times of upheavals or fast moving events, such as in recent days here in Tunisia, you would be justifiably concerned. We have a system in place – a mechanism exists – to ensure your security at all times in the context of the Bank’s business continuity plans.

The second point I want to raise with you this evening concerns our plans to return to our headquarters in Abidjan, the Ivory Coast. For 10 years now we have been privileged with Tunisian hospitality. We are eternally grateful to the Government and People of this country. They have seen to it that the Bank is able to function, even during periods of upheavals.

Now as normality comes back to our headquarters, the competent governing organs of the Bank have recommended that we return to Abidjan. At our Annual Meetings in May, this decision is expected to be ratified, leading the way to the beginning of the process of return. In accordance with the roadmap agreed upon, that process will begin this year, 2013, and accelerate next year, 2014.

Expectations are that the large majority of staff will have relocated to Abidjan by the end of 2014, as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary. Tunis will, of course, remain our temporary relocation agency and a major centre of our operations in North Africa and we will still have a significant footprint here. Senior management and I understand this to be a delicate exercise that will in many ways be disruptive to you.
We understand that you want to be absolutely sure that you are returning to a safe location with all the facilities that you and your families need to function optimally. Rest assured that this process will be carried out with all care, attention and rigour to ensure a smooth return and minimize disruptions to your lives and the work of the Bank. We are working closely with both the Ivorian and Tunisian Governments to ensure a seamless, smooth return.

As I pointed out to you earlier when I met staff, this return will be orderly, phased and gradual to coincide with availability of office space, accommodation and other facilities. Three issues are primordial for us:

- Safety and security;
- Facilities such as schools in English and French; and
- Clinics and other infrastructures.

The overall aim being that we return you to a fully functioning, safe and comfortable environment.

I take the opportunity to thank both the Tunisian and Ivorian Governments for their smooth cooperation.

As we begin this momentous year I want to congratulate you again for your commitment which makes us all very proud of this institution. Ours is a first-class, a world-class institution, robust, strong and relevant and that is thanks to you, staff, the families who support you, management, Board, shareholders and partners in Africa and beyond.

I thank all those who contribute in no small way to your welfare, the HR Department, the staff of our Medical Centre and sports facilities.

My commendation also goes to the Staff Council and the Family Association for the work they do.

May God bless you all in this New Year and have a wonderful evening.

Thank you.