Ending Fragility in Africa
Challenges and Opportunities

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The IMF’s World Economic Outlook projects Africa’s real GDP growth for 2013 to be 5.7%. With average real growth rates in the advanced economies running at 1.3%, the African growth acceleration has caught widespread attention.

A recent McKinsey report on Africa speaks of “lions on the move”, while The Economist sees in Africa the “hottest frontier” in terms of foreign investment. The new Chinese President stated in a recent speech in Tanzania – which, by the way, was part of his first overseas trip as head of state – that the “African lion is galloping faster and faster.”

The positive outlook for Africa is encouraging, but the continued risk of ongoing and new conflict remains. We have seen the more recent examples in Mali, the deepening crises in North Africa and the continued clashes in Somalia.

Active conflict is a huge threat to the painful gains made by the respective countries and their neighbours. We know that a year of active conflict has a negative impact on the country’s GDP as much as 2.5% and will reverse the trends of development as much as 15 years.

We know that there is no “one recipe” for all and that the drivers of conflict are diverse and unique to each country’s political history. Then, how do we start to address the challenges of development and lead the nation to statebuilding and peaceful future?

The fragility trap is a reality that African leaders face on a daily basis. The need for sustainable peace has never been stronger before. This is the time for Africa and we must make sure that it stays that way.

For these many obvious risks and challenges to African prosperity, I have initiated, together with Her Excellency President Sirleaf, the High Level Panel on Fragile States. The onus is on us as the development community at large: you the policy-makers of the conflict affected countries, the civil society which is the partner in statebuilding.

We must answer the following questions:

- How can we ensure that conflict becomes a thing of the past in Africa?
- How can we make peace sustainable?
- How do we establish elements of sustainable inclusive growth which addresses the drivers of past conflict?
- What can we do to change our principles of engagement to ensure country ownership?
When we look at the trend of conflict and crises in Africa, we see a dynamic change in the nature and causes behind the ongoing and new conflict. States have become significantly weak due to the intra- and inter-regional conflict and which has continuously driven further into a cycle of violence, lack of security and increasing risk to social and economic stability and development.

We can also see that unless we take drastic measures that address the roots of the drivers of conflict, Africa will not rid itself of the risk of conflict. Our vision is to have a conflict-free Africa.

At the African Development Bank we realize conflict as a real threat to the post-2015 agenda and to the achievements of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. I believe all of us in this room have supported the Busan process and show our commitment. But we cannot leave this to be just another declaration.

We need to make sure that we ask the right questions and have all the right answers now. We cannot afford another decade of having missed our MDGs and still trying to address issues of basic services. We must act now and we must act fast to support the issues that continue to cause fragility, conflict and put at risk the post-conflict state building and peace-building process.

The High Level Panel on Fragile States has taken up this important task to provide all of us with directions that are needed, answers to questions that are recurrent, solutions that work, and a future for Africa that we all want – free of conflict and fragility.

The High Level Panel on Fragile States will put together their combined knowledge and expertise to this dedicated task. For example, what is the nexus between climate change, conflict and poverty reduction. Where are the challenges and how do we address them meaningfully? Why do women and children continue to be at risk of becoming victims of war? What urgent and immediate actions must we support that they can live in an environment free of violence?

The Bank has been awarded a prize of recognition for its work in Côte D’Ivoire to address gender-based violence and to promote urgently needed gender-friendly activities to promote post-conflict reintegration and economic growth in the north of the country. Such interventions are highly likely to further drive Africa towards an enormous transformational shift based on political and democratic inclusion.

We, as partners and donors, are ready to support this process. To give one example, the Bank is fully engaged in the South Sudan and Sudan negotiations since 2010. We have supported both countries and the AU with high level strategic
and legal advice as well as a clear plan on financial and economic planning with a clear outlook to increasing public and private investments in the country.

A legacy of situations of post conflict is the rapid urbanization of towns and cities bringing with it increasing urban poverty and risk to security. Therefore, making peace sustainable is central to all statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts. The Bank has used its Fragile States Facility to support programs which address local growth and solutions. Our focus on infrastructure such as the financing of the critical Fish Town-Harper Road promotes further the agenda of the Government of Liberia to “leave no one behind”. We now need to go further and make sure that our efforts to support infrastructure development become the engine of growth and prosperity in this Africa.

We know that situations of fragility and post-conflict need urgently to address economic growth and social development that is inclusive.

For this reason, promoting youth employment opportunities has been on the top of the Bank’s agenda with particular attention to post-conflict countries. Specific attention to integrating skills training, options for entrepreneurship and increased access to ICT connectivity has been consistently driven through by my teams. I believe that our youth will be the “guardians of peace” and should therefore be appropriately empowered.

My discussions with the High Level Panel on Fragile States continue to bring the challenges related to institutional capacity building to the forefront. We cannot take this critical gap lightly. How do we get it right? How do we ensure that the country benefits from its human capital and continues to increase significantly the technical skills needed to manage the functions of the government?

The Bank’s support to build capable institutions is at the centre of these efforts and continues to be an important instrument towards statebuilding and peacebuilding. For example, the Bank’s support towards the Liberian extractive industries and transparency initiative resulted in the country being the first African nation to be fully compliant.

The High Level Panel on Fragile States is my personal effort to get us all closer to a conflict-free Africa.

It is our joint effort to ensure that Africa continues to prosper and every single citizen on this continent has an opportunity to live in a secure and peaceful environment with all the opportunities to succeed for generations to come.

Thank you.