



WELCOME REMARKS BY PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME

1st Meles Zenawi Symposium on Development

Kigali, 21 August 2015

Good morning to everyone. I want to start by welcoming you most warmly to our country, Rwanda.

I would like to thank the Meles family, and the Meles Zenawi Foundation, for honouring us, Rwanda, by hosting the first Symposium on Development here in Kigali.

Three years ago, we learned that Comrade Meles had left us. He was a great friend and an inspiration to us in Rwanda, during our struggle and after.

This forum is a fitting tribute to his vision and intellectual legacy, and I commend the African Development Bank's support for the initiative.

Ethiopians have made enormous strides, and continue to do so. Ethiopia charts its own course, and I believe this is the key factor behind its success, and the pivotal role that it plays on our continent. Their whole history is littered with proof of what they have done to achieve this success.



Let me highlight two elements of Meles's thinking, which remain as refreshingly subversive as ever.

First, he rejected the false choice between the state and the market. Every developed economy, without exception, is the fruit of a free market, and a strong developmental state, working in tandem.

The orthodoxy of shrinking the state to the bare minimum, and replacing it with externally-funded non-state actors (here you can say NGOs), left Africa with no viable path out of poverty. Not to forget the fact that some of the problems of our continent are really self-inflicted. A third way had to be found and fortunately there has been some progress in this regard.

Second, Meles's starting point was that democracy and development are actually inseparable. There is no trade-off, no choice to be made between them. Indeed, they are almost the same thing.

While there may be some examples of non-democratic developmental states, they should not be the example for Africa, with all its diversity.

You cannot make sense of the development gains that have been recorded in parts of our continent without understanding how deeply our citizens are involved in governance and accountability.



Democracy and development both depend on a good politics, in which there is no room for the powerful special interests who benefitted most from the predatory states created by colonialism, and propped up by Cold War cynicism.

Yet lately, the word 'democracy' has been twisted to bring developing countries, our own, to some kind of order, especially those which have sought to liberate themselves from these prejudices. Our democratic advances are constantly negated, and in actual fact subverted.

Our youth hear that Africa's backwardness is the fault of our leaders and our cultures. They are told that an external buffer is needed to protect Africans from their governments and even from themselves.

It is time for clarity. The democratic ideal has been at the heart of our various liberation struggles from the beginning, and it has guided us ever since, as we build new modern institutions.

Ours is the true democracy of citizens, not the false one of institutionalised corruption and division (or 'rent-seeking', as Comrade Meles usually said). We cannot be bullied into accepting policies that misrepresent us and do us harm in the end, as we have seen over many years.

After all, as Africans we are people who have the courage of having been tested by history, and our choices reflect that. If some of us



took up arms to fight for our future, it was so that our children would never have to do so.

But make no mistake about it, the challenges we face today require just as much fighting spirit and resilience. We cannot afford to apologise for the very things that work for us and make us strong. Deference is too easily mistaken for agreement.

It isn't about scoring debate points. It is about the reality that everyone's security and well-being depend on working closely together, in this globalised world.

African intellectuals, think tanks, and others who should be speaking up, must be fearless in articulating our stories and our aspirations for the future. In fact, they owe it to us to do us proud.

There is no better place to start than right here, inspired by the life and work of Comrade Meles Zenawi.

Welcome once again, and thank you. I very much look forward to the stimulating discussions on today's agenda.