



Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

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Distinguished delegates,

It is a pleasure to be here with you and I am speaking to you after having the benefit of spending last week in Africa. I was in Nairobi and, Kampala and Addis, for many, many meetings and discussions, but I want to tell you about an afternoon I spent in Nairobi, where, after meetings with the UN officials and officials of the government of Kenya – very good meetings – I went to visit a project that the Canadian Government has been supporting in the community in Nairobi called Matare, which is, in one of the most challenging, communities in the city. And I spent the afternoon with young people. It was an incredible experience for me because it was a reminder of the challenges of Africa, but also the opportunities, which are very real.

First of all, the challenges: deep poverty, constantly facing the challenges of getting to school at all, whether kids can stay in school. Are they going to be able to advance? Are they going to be able to move forward? And a reminder of the realities of the choices that families and kids face in their in their real lives.

And I just think we need to really reach out to one another and connect at that very real human level of understanding that the challenge of development is not about numbers dancing on a page. It's not about statistics. It's not even about speeches. It's about our taking the time to really try to understand how we can help each other succeed.



And for a long time, I think we thought that if we provided, some assistance and some help, that would be advanced economies could say we we're doing our we're doing a bit. We're doing what we can. But I think it's clear to me and I said this in my speech in Kampala as well.

The first message that I have to for you is perhaps a tough message, and that is Africans will have to find the way. It's not going to come from anybody else. The colonial experience did not provide that. We all know that. And the post colonial experience has only provided so much and not enough.

So we need to understand that there is always going to be a decision for a society as to how much does the government spend on education, how much does it spend on health, how much does it spend on interest payments for debts which have been accumulated from the past, and how much does it spend on science, technology, and innovation, which seems like an abstraction when you're dealing with the everyday problems of feeding people and educating people and providing them with health care. But like everything else in life, sometimes we have to save a little bit of money, and we have to invest a little bit of money for the longer term. For making a difference in the technological capacity of every of every country. Technological capacity of every of every country. That capacity will not come from, for the most part, I have to say it, it will not come from outside.

And when you consider the announcements that a variety of governments have made, including the government of the United States, our host country here, we know that it's not coming from outside. We've been told it's not coming. So, we can either throw up our hands and say, say, well, that's that. That's the end of that. What are we going to do?

The answer has to come from within, has to come from really making the trade agreements within Africa work, making sure that there are no barriers, making sure we deal with the illicit financial flows, which is a polite word for corruption,



and deal with that because if money's being taken out of the economy by people for their own benefit, that hurts everybody else. And if there are tax havens that are preventing countries from getting full access to the wealth of the country, that hurts everybody. That's like stealing from this generation. So, I say to all of you, to this generation, the challenge is in all of our hands, and the answer is also in all of our hands.

Ce n'est pas que l'Afrique doit le faire toute seule. Absolument pas. L'Afrique a le droit d'attendre une réponse positive de la part de nous tous. Je ne dis pas que nous n'avons pas des obligations dans les pays les plus avancés. Oui, au contraire. Nous avons des obligations et nous devons continuer. Mais l'essentiel, c'est vraiment d'insister sur ce point, l'importance pour cette génération d'insister sur des réponses de leur propre gouvernement et d'insister sur une réponse axée sur l'éducation, sur la science, sur les investissements en technologies.

We know the numbers. There are a huge number of young people being born every day in Africa, and that number is going to continue to mean that we will have a huge younger population in Africa. Africa is one of the fastest growing part of the world in terms of population. The challenge is to say, how can we turn that into an opportunity for investment, for education so that the generation that is growing up has access to work, to education, and, yes, to wealth and prosperity. It won't happen without hard work, and it won't happen without important decisions by government.

We at ECOSOC have been spending a lot of time on science, technology, and innovation. We have a week coming up in May, the week from May 5 to May 9, when we will be focusing on this question of science, technology, and innovation and also the question of access. I will be chairing a meeting on May 6 on artificial intelligence, where we'll be looking at how can we harness artificial intelligence for the benefit of all, for the benefit of everyone. And so, we're continuing to look at this question from a very, very practical and real point of view.



I can't tell you how, how much I've appreciated the response and also the warmth of the welcome that I received in Kampala and in in Addis and in Nairobi, where I feel that the direct approach we're taking in ECOSOC to talk about these problems in what I hope is a real way, not just a theoretical way, can convince people that the dialogue must continue. No matter how wrong some decisions by governments are, wherever they are, we must continue to find a way to listen to each other.

So now for the next hour, I'm going to listen. Thank you.