

Speech by the President of the European Parliament

Hans-Gert Pöttering

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Your Excellency President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Chairperson of the African Union,

Madam President of the Pan-African Parliament, dear Colleague Gertrude Mongella,

Dear Regional Speakers,

Honourable Members of the Pan-African Parliament,

Colleagues from the European Parliament, Dear friends

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be invited to address this tenth ordinary session of the Pan-African Parliament. The European Parliament has from the very beginning enthusiastically welcomed the creation of the Pan-African Parliament as a sign of hope for the whole continent. And together we have already made a lot of tangible progress in our relationship through concrete action:

The EP has sent delegations to almost all Ordinary Sessions of your parliament since 2004. Regular contacts between the Presidents of our Parliaments were established. Since 2004 five such bilateral meetings have taken place and today I feel proud to stand here in front of you

accompanied by a delegation that includes two Vice Presidents of the European Parliaments.

At your request the European Parliament provided technical advice for the establishment of the Pan African Parliament's Strategic Plan 2006-2010.

In 2006 the European Parliament established an ad-hoc delegation for relations with the Pan African Parliament and in 2007 you established a similar ad-hoc committee for relations with us. Since their establishment these bodies have met at least twice a year. Their last joint meeting took place last month at the European Parliament in Brussels in the framework of Africa Week, which we organized in the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

The Pan-African Parliament is an institution, which is dear to my heart and to the heart of a great number of my parliamentary colleagues in the European Parliament. One of the reasons for this is that there are so many similarities between our two institutions.

In the first joint statement our Parliaments issued almost one year ago in preparation for the Second EU-Africa Summit, we defined our role as follows (and I quote):

«As bodies made up of elected representatives, our parliaments are the only representative institutions in our continent-wide Unions.

Furthermore, parliaments have a distinctive role and one which makes them pivotal to good governance: they are responsible for representing the interests of all sectors of society, articulating these interests into relevant policies, allocating the necessary budgets for their implementation and seeing to it that these policies are implemented efficiently. In all democratic societies, parliaments have a primary part to play in providing links between the State and civil society and other non-state actors, and in encouraging the participation in the management of public affairs by civil society and social partners. The parliamentary dimension of a people-centred EU-AU partnership should be evident, because parliamentary representatives reflect the views of the citizens they represent. Parliaments are therefore an essential element in any governance mix; without functioning parliaments, there can be no democracy.”

It is therefore our primary responsibility to ensure that our Parliaments are competent and efficient bodies, equipped to and capable of fulfilling that mandate.

You and I, Madam President, were able to deliver to the assembled African and European Heads of State and Government a strong message on the necessity of a solid parliamentary dimension in the EU-Africa strategy.

And last but not least I should mention the practical and technical cooperation and parliamentary capacity building actions through our

newly established Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD).

This is only a beginning. This afternoon the delegations of our two Parliaments will examine further possibilities for joint action.

Moreover I will also be happy to suggest to the European Parliament to create a full Interparliamentary Delegation for relations with the Pan-African Parliament, which would be established during the new parliamentary term in the autumn of next year.

Dear President,
Honourable Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am standing here in front of you at a time when the world is grappling with the worst financial crisis in recent times.

But this crisis is not just affecting the wealthier nations - sadly, there is already - a knock-on effect on developing countries: with less overseas investment, reluctance to increase development aid, and a looming recession that will, I fear, affect the livelihoods of many. The food crisis is just one of the manifestations of this global crisis.

It is all the more important, therefore, for parliaments like ours to watch over the actions of governments and international organisations in how they adopt measures to deal with this crisis. It is essential for us to promote joint efforts, rather than national self-interest. It is essential for us to ensure that the weakest and the defenceless are not pushed to the wall in the scramble for economic survival.

It is in this context that the European Union's proposal for a food facility to assist African agriculture in particular should not suffer as a result of this crisis.

I can assure you that the European Parliament will continue to be vigilant to ensure that the donor community continues to honor its commitments. Therefore our Parliament has decided to send a parliamentary delegation to the Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development next month.

Europe cannot have a good future without a good future for Africa. This is our self-interest. We are on your side in the fight to eradicate poverty because we are confronted with the consequences if we fail in this fight as much as Africa is confronted with its consequences.

The dignity of each human being is at the core of my personal belief in the meaning of politics. As politicians, we need to serve the dignity of each human being, no matter where she or he lives. We share the same earth, its resources, joys and tears.

My heart is bleeding if I see starving children, if I see people without rights and minimal social protection for themselves and their families, if I see people drowning when trying to reach Europe in smallest boats that barely deserve this name.

Dear President,
Honourable Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many African countries set impressive examples for the peaceful neighbourhood between people of different cultural and especially of different religious backgrounds.

But, I believe, it is fair and honest among friends to also add that this shouldn't make us lose sight of deficits which we need to address in order to correct them. Our concern for human rights and good governance is not a matter of post-colonial paternalism. It is the very application of our joint commitment to universal protection of human dignity.

Therefore, we in the European Parliament will continue to monitor closely developments in the Great Lakes region, in Sudan, in Mauritania, in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, of course, in Zimbabwe. We are grateful that the European Parliament and the Pan-African Parliament have had very similar assessments in this regard

until now. Together we must not stop to be the advocates of human dignity, of human rights, rule of law and democratic governance.

The European Parliament is awarding the Sakharov Prize in memory of this impressive Russian advocate of human rights every year. Several outstanding African personalities had been awarded this Sakharov Prize: In 1988, the very first prize winner was Nelson Mandela. The last one in 2007, was Salih Mahmoud Mohamed Osman, a Sudanese human rights activist actively defending the many victims of the conflict in Darfur.

I would like to recognize with the expression of greatest respect the excellent work by Honourable Khumalo and his colleagues of the election observation delegation of the Pan African Parliament to Zimbabwe.

The people of Zimbabwe have suffered too long. They have shown patience, endurance and courage to participate in this election. Now it is more than urgent to implement the agreement reached on 15 September 2008. Nobody can just sit and watch the country further sink into violence and agony.

The people of Zimbabwe have clearly expressed their will. Therefore, it is the task of all parties concerned to implement it in good faith. I note and welcome the presence of President Motlanthe in Harare today.

Let me address another burning issue. The European Parliament has addressed in an emergency resolution only last Thursday:

The current clashes in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are cause for great concern.

The UN troops MONUC are unfortunately unable to calm tensions and the head of MONUC has called the situation 'very, very serious' while briefing the UN Security Council. He asked for a reinforcement of troops to be able to fulfil the mandate and protect civilians.

The renewed fighting has put tremendous hardship on the people with the result of massacres, rape, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. 150.000 persons were displaced in the past weeks alone.

In our resolution we call on all parties to return to the negotiating table. But more action is needed and I would welcome more pressure from the African Union and other local actors to bring an end to the fighting.

The European Parliament began over fifty years ago, a consultative Assembly of members appointed from national parliaments, as you are now. It was only in 1979, 27 years later, that the first direct elections were held. I am, incidentally, one of those pioneer members who first took up his seat in 1979.

I urge you, the Pan-African Parliament, to also persevere on the long march towards a *directly elected* and *legislative* Parliament, which is what Africa and the peoples of Africa need and deserve.

Dear President Mongella, you have said a few minutes ago that the spirit of your Parliament is expressed as ‘One Africa, One Voice’. We in the European Parliament fully endorse this.

Our two parliaments are at the forefront of a new reality in world politics. Our two parliaments are the spearhead of a new global political culture in the 21st century that recognizes regions and their identities and helps to jointly manage the challenges of our time.

Dear President,
Honourable Members,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It remains for me to thank you for your welcome and warm hospitality here in Midrand, to wish you all the best during this 10th ordinary session of your Assembly and in your future parliamentary activities.

I like to use quotations from Africa and there is one I feel is so appropriate here: "Return to old watering holes for more than water - friends and dreams are there to meet you."

Dear Gertrude, dear friends, I do hope to meet again at one of our watering holes, in Europe or in Africa, to continue pursuing our common dreams together.

Mongo i bareki Afrika
May God Bless Africa
Que Dieu benisse L'Afrique
Die Here sèèn Afrika
Nkosi sikelela Afrika