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SPEECH BY PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS, BARONESS AMOS, AT A JOINT MEETING OF THE ROYAL AFRICAN SOCIETY AND THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY, WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY 2002

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I have been asked to speak on British Policy in Africa. This is an ambitious title for the time available. What I would like to do is set out in broad terms some of the developments which have been particularly important, since I took up my role as Minister for Africa in June last year.

This is an exciting time to be in this job. You will recall the Prime Minister's commitment in Edinburgh last May that, if elected, he would make Africa a major personal priority, and a priority for the government. And I know that – despite the new demands which the tragic events of 11 September have placed on us all – this is something which remains high on his agenda.

He promoted Africa's cause at the G8 Summit last June, encouraging the G8's collective welcome for what was then the New African Initiative, now renamed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD).

CHALLENGES FACING AFRICA

The challenges facing Africa – and anyone who takes a serious interest in promoting Africa and its development – are daunting.

KY Amoako, the Chairman of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, reminded us of this when he spoke at Downing Street in December. Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa, has a per capita income of $326, about one seventy-fifth of that of the UK. That leaves four of every 10 Africans living in extreme poverty on less than $1 a day. Fourteen years ago about 200 million Africans lived in such poverty. Today, 100 million more have joined them.
While progress in Asia and large parts of Latin America are putting us on the path to meeting the International Development Goals by 2015, on current trends, Africa will not meet those goals.

While globally the proportion of people in poverty will be cut from 25% today to 11% in 2015, Africa is likely to be stuck around 37% - more than three times the global average.

Some recent World Bank calculations on the prospects of Sub-Saharan Africa meeting the development goals were equally bleak:

Only half of sub-Saharan African countries are on track to have universal basic education by 2015;
Only a few countries will have gender balance in secondary schools by 2005;
Only one country is on track to reduce infant mortality by two-thirds by 2015;
Only six countries are on track to cut malnutrition in half by 2015.

NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

The growing sense of urgency and determination felt in Africa has to a large extent found its focus in the New Partnership for Africa's Development, or NePAD.

Originally developed by the leaders of South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Senegal, and Algeria, the New Partnership for Africa's Development was endorsed and adopted by the whole of Africa at the Summit of the Organization of African Unity held in Lusaka in July 2001.

The New Partnership is designed to place African countries – both individually and collectively – on a path to sustainable growth and development. And at the same time to help them participate actively in a globalising world.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development has a number of important features:

- It is clearly an African-led process, with a strong sense of African responsibility in responding to the continent's challenges;
- Sound political and economic governance are recognised as central to Africa's development;
- Its leaders are seeking a new type of partnership with Africa's international friends, based on shared responsibility and mutual interest.

I believe there is a new political will emerging among a number of African leaders at present. They are ready to engage more vigorously with the full range of Africa's problems – from conflict prevention to corruption. They want Africa to take its proper place in the international community and to access the benefits of globalisation. They want a new more genuine partnership with us. One where Africans take primary responsibility for meeting Africa's challenges.

Now, if the New Partnership represents a new political will on the part of Africa's leaders to tackle the challenges of the continent, what should our response be?

Many of the New Partnership for Africa's Development 's themes fit closely with current UK policy towards Africa, and will allow us to build on work we are already doing.

Since 1997, we have refocused our development programme to concentrate on poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. To this end, we have unilaterally untied all our development assistance. And since 1997 we have all but doubled our aid to Africa.

We are taking a leading role in working with our international partners and with international organisations to try and achieve more effective aid. And we do recognise in the New Partnership for Africa's Development a real opportunity to develop a new and more equal partnership between Africa and the UK, and between Africa and the international community more widely. And this deserves a specific response and encouragement from us.

G8 ACTION PLAN

One part of this was the Prime Minister's action in encouraging G8 partners to draw up an Africa Action Plan for the 2002 G8 Summit. The Prime Minister appointed me as his Personal Representative on the G8 Group which is taking this work forward.

Our group will have a series of meetings in the run-up to the 2002 G8 Summit. Our main objective in drawing up the Action Plan is to help define a new way of co-operating with Africa. We want to address the policy constraints that inhibit Africa's development. This means taking concrete measures in the areas of trade and investment, aid and debt, conflict prevention and infrastructure support.