

Special Address by Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

On 27 January 2005, Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (profile), spoke at the Annual Meeting in the session Opening Plenary by Tony Blair The transcript of his full remarks is below.

"Interdependence is the governing characteristic of modern international politics. Its obvious corollary is unity of purpose in the international community. Yet the past few years have been marked by division. The trauma of September 11th and its aftermath; wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; MEPP stalled and slid back; disagreement over the Kyoto Protocol on climate change; and a feeling of helplessness as we watch the continent of Africa unique among the continents of the world, see its poverty intensify, and its peoples ravaged by conflict, famine and disease: all have contributed to a sense of alienation and discord.

In 2000 when I last addressed this Forum, the international atmosphere was unified, even benign. Yet in truth, the same issues were present; the unity often based in false hope.

Today the issues seem more raw. But they are also clearer. There is no pretence about the problems or the division. The question is: can we find an agenda that re-unifies us?

Curious as it may seem, given my introduction, I believe we can. There is no shortage of goodwill to resolve the problems if the perception of them is plain. The remarkable response, not only of Governments but most of all of people to the Tsunami shows there is an abundance of the human sentiment of solidarity. Bill Gates's donation of \$750 million – more than many countries' entire aid budgets – to tackle the killer diseases of Africa, demonstrates the possibility of business compassion.

But there is a more fundamental political reason for optimism. We may disagree about the nature of the problems and how to resolve them, but no nation, however powerful, seriously believes today that these problems can be resolved alone. Interdependence is no longer disputed.

President Bush's inauguration speech last week, marks a consistent evolution of US policy. He spoke of America's mission to bring freedom in place of tyranny to the world. Leave aside for a moment the odd insistence by some commentators that such a plea is evidence of the "neo-conservative" grip on Washington – I thought progressives were all in favour of freedom rather than tyranny. The underlying features of the speech seem to me to be these. America accepts that terrorism cannot be defeated by military might alone. The more people live under democracy, with human liberty intact, the less inclined they or their states will be to indulge terrorism or to engage in it. This may be open to debate – though personally I agree with it – but it emphatically puts defeating the causes of terrorism alongside defeating the terrorists.

Secondly, by its very nature, such a mission cannot be accomplished alone. It is the very antithesis of isolationism; the very essence of international engagement. It requires long-term co-operation.

And it is based on enlightened self-interest. Freedom is good in itself. But it is also the best ultimate guarantee that human beings will live in sympathy with each other. The hard head has led to the warm heart.

None of this means the hard head won't still be applied. America, as is perhaps inevitable being the world's only superpower, who in the end is expected not just to talk about the world's problems but to solve them, approaches all issues with a propensity to question what others assume, treat the pressure of pressure groups with resistance and ask others to share responsibility as well have it demanded of America.

But no-one could say the inauguration speech was lacking in idealism.

However, if America wants the rest of the world to be part of the agenda it has set, it must be part of their agenda too. It can do so, secure in the knowledge that what people want is not for America to concede, but to engage. The hard-headed approach should stay – the one that says: don't assert it, prove it, face up to the difficult realities as well as the easy platitudes. But difficult reality does not only come in one form.

So there is common ground as to interdependence. There is a wish to re-unify. It is absurd to choose between an agenda focussing on terrorism and one on global poverty, especially as in part at least, they are linked.

What would be the subject matter of a common agenda?

First, obviously, to maintain vigilance and cooperation against global terrorism. Second, to take the high flown principles we set out in the United Nations Charter about human rights and freedom and as and when we can, seek to increase the number of people able to live in democracy, subject to the protection of the rule of law. We do not accept the right of states to abuse their citizens; and though progress to this end may for good cause, be slow, we are explicit about our ambition for humanity to reach this goal. This does not mean that we seek to impose democracy on every state or interfere in other nations' proper internal affairs. But it does mean we know that dictatorship is, in the long run, incompatible with human progress. Incidentally, when people talk of "Western-style" democracy, in my view there is no such thing: there is democracy or there isn't. The notion of democracy being a "Western idea" is a nonsense, and mythology as, most recently the people of Afghanistan have powerfully demonstrated.

And, whatever divisions there were over the decision to remove Saddam from Iraq; we can surely all agree that we should support the brave Iraqi people who want to vote on 30 January and should be free to do so without violence.

Third, there is the urgent need to breath new life into the MEPP. The terms on which America will take this forward are increasingly clear. An independent Palestinian state must be viable not just in respect of territory but in its institutions of statehood-democracy, security and economy. The Palestinians wish for this. We should support

them in doing it. If that happens, then, the disengagement from the Gaza and part of the West Bank, by Israel, can be the first not the last step to such a Palestinian state.

Then fourth and fifth are the two issues we have set aside for our Presidency of the G8: climate change and Africa.

Why do it? Not just because they matter. But because on both there are differences that need to be reconciled; and if they could be reconciled or at least moved forward, it would make a huge difference to the prospects of international unity; as well as to peoples lives and our future survival.

We live in a world where 300 million Africans still don't have access to safe drinking water. Not deprived simply of the relative luxuries of clothing or shelter or electricity, but the most basic requirement of existence: clean water. Three thousand African children under the age of five die every day from malaria. Six thousand people die each day from AIDS.

In the Congo alone, over five years, almost three million people have died in its war torn territory.

We know all of this. So what can be done? And given past history and Africa's continuing suffering, what different can be done? The Africa Commission, established last May by me and half of whose membership is African, has at its heart two guiding principles.

First we cannot confront the endemic perpetual crisis of African poverty on any basis other than a partnership between African Governments and those of the developed world. The old donor/recipient relationship is patronising and unworkable. But we need to help African leadership grow further, building democratic and institutional capacity that allows African nations to govern effectively, create proper political, legal, fiscal and commercial systems of sound government and root out corruption. There are some positive signs. Democracy in Africa is spreading and is now the norm. African institutions, like the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development are growing stronger. But commitment by the developed world is rightly conditional. It is help on the only basis that works: help not as charity but as a route to independence from it.

Secondly when the Commission reports in March, some months before the G8, it will be seen that the report is more than a re-statement of conventional wisdom. It will attempt systematically and comprehensively to deal with all aspects of Africa's plight. Of course it will state what is necessary over time on aid and debt relief. There is no doubt a substantial uplift in aid is needed. That is why Britain has proposed a doubling of aid. The International Finance Facility is one way to finance this, with the minimum possible impact on countries' budgets. Britain has now agreed a timetable to achieve the UN 0.7 per cent aid target. But I know there are other options that will be put forward. We need 100 per cent debt relief for the most highly indebted nations and President Chirac, I know will make proposals for raising further money.

If a financing package such as the IFF is agreed, it will enable us to mobilise \$50bn globally and within this \$25bn for Africa. The Millennium Development Goals,

agreed to by all the international community, can't be met without such help. As 2015 approaches, so will the inadequacy of present provision be more manifest.

The killer diseases – HIV/AIDs/TB/malaria, are desperate, urgent, requiring money expertise with, of course, in-country health care systems capable of using them.

But the plan does not stop there. It is clear about the obligation of good governance. It will be frank about issues of trade: we must open our markets, cut our subsidies, including on controversial items such as cotton and sugar; and we must help build African economic capacity to allow poor countries to manage trade reforms in a way that makes them richer not poorer.

As much as anything else, we must confront the challenge of conflict resolution. Not until a continent, rich in resources, ceases to be a victim of wars of plunder will Africa have any hope of utilising the help given. This capability to intervene and keep the peace has to be built in Africa itself. Today in the Sudan AU peacekeeping forces do their best. Without them, progress would be impossible. But if there was the proper capability with sufficient numbers of forces, well equipped and trained, so much more could have been done. So much more must be done in future conflicts.

I do not pretend every part of this report will be to everyone's liking. But I hope its essential principles can be accepted and I hope also to propose at the time of the G8 a mechanism to ensure that what is agreed, is then followed through and acted upon.

In respect of Africa, the problem is universally acknowledged. In respect of climate change it isn't. There are facts that are accepted. The five hottest years on record have occurred in the last seven years; and ten hottest in the last fourteen. It is over eighteen years since the world recorded a "colder-than-normal" month. Snow cover has decreased 10 per cent since the 1960s.

Ever since Arrhenius first predicted global warming in 1896, it has been fiercely debated. I am not a scientific expert. I only see that the balance of evidence has shifted one way. Some argue this warming is part of a natural cycle such as, by contrast, the mini ice age in the Middle Ages. But glaciers are now in retreat that have not retreated since the last Ice Age, 12,000 years ago. The impact of climate change predicted by modellers is uncannily coming to pass, not least in the European summer of 2003.

So it would be true to say the evidence is still disputed. It would be wrong to say that the evidence of danger is not clearly and persuasively advocated by a very large number of entirely independent and compelling voices. They are the majority. The majority is not always right; but they deserve to be listened to.

However, behind the dispute over science is another concern. Political leaders worry they are being asked to take unacceptable falls in economic growth and living standards to tackle climate change.

My view is that if we put forward, as a solution to climate change, something which involves drastic cuts in growth or standards of living, it matters not how justified it is, it simply won't be agreed to. But fortunately that need not be the case. Science and

technology cannot alone provide the answer. But they certainly provide the means to ensure that we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions without damaging our economy. Indeed over time they provide the prospect of significant business and economic opportunities.

For example, in Europe all nations have ratified the Kyoto Treaty. It will come into force on February 16. The European trading scheme is in place. This will be a powerful driver to more sustainable means of energy generation, industrial production and to business activity.

So what do we hope for the G8 whose countries, after all, account for 65 per cent of global GDP and 47 per cent of global CO2 emissions?

First to set a direction of travel. Whether because of the risks associated with climate change or related issues of security of energy supply, we need to send a clear signal that whilst we continue to analyse science – and the conference in Exeter next week will help – we are united in moving in the direction of greenhouse gas reductions. I support the Kyoto Protocol. Others will not and that position is understood. But business and the global economy need to know this isn't an issue that is going away. My clear view, for what it is worth, is that the debate will be how and on what time scale it is confronted; not whether. I intend to make progress on this with the EU Presidency later this year as well as through the G8.

Secondly, through the G8 process I want to develop a package of practical measures, largely focused on technology, to cut emissions. And here I don't just mean research into new technologies, important though that is. I also think we need to work much harder to find ways to implement the vast range of low-carbon technologies that have already been developed. Energy efficiency. Renewable energy sources. Cleaner fossil fuels. Avoiding waste. All of this can be done, and often at a much lower cost than we realise.

Thirdly, the G8 need to work in partnership with the rapidly developing economies like China, India, Brazil and South Africa to find a way for them to grow and develop as low carbon economies. I was struck by the fact that by 2030, coal plants in developing countries could produce more carbon emissions than the entire power sector in the OECD does now. Developed and emerging economies must work together over the coming months and years to reach a new consensus on how we deal with the challenge of climate change.

It is through this fresh injection of political will, by the G8 and the emerging economies alike, that these differences can be broken down and a new global consensus reached.

So that is what we will try for.

Whatever the difficulties in moving this agenda forward, they are worth it. If we succeed there is a chance of an emerging consensus that would give so much hope and heart to so many.

The alternative is the international community with competing agendas. That may help the political art of grandstanding but it won't present constructive solutions. And the result of it, or to put it more specifically the danger of it, is that the world decides on an approach that recognises this fragmentation is inevitable, even welcome. In this way, different poles of power develop to balance each other. American and its allies here. Europe there. China, Russia, India, the larger nations of Asia and Latin America creating their own poles or moving towards shifting pulls of attraction or repulsion depending on the issue.

Of course these poles can interact; in theory they can form partnerships from time to time. But let us be clear this would not be a new global alliance. It would be a global acceptance of division; no amount of interaction will disguise that and different poles of power can just as easily choose to rival each other as co-operate with each other.

This year offers a unique set of opportunities. I am committed to using the UK's G8 and EU Presidencies to try to make a breakthrough on Africa and climate change. The UN Summit in September will review progress on the Millennium Development Goals including the Sachs Millennium Project report proposals, and discuss the Secretary General's High Level panel report. There is the World Trade Ministerial in December; and the meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at the end of the year. All of these opportunities must be used to the full.

I started this speech with talk of dates.

It is 60 years ago tomorrow that Russian troops liberated Auschwitz. That day when the full horror of the holocaust was revealed to the world, was perhaps Europe's lowest point. Devastated by war, disfigured by evil, divided by the Iron Curtain, the 20th century saw dark days indeed for this Continent.

On May 1st last year, Europeans from North, South, East and West celebrated as ten new countries joined the European Union. Now 450 million Europeans are enjoying peace, freedom and democracy.

We should never underestimate the capacity of people to make a difference and rise to new challenges.

The question is whether the hopes of the people are matched by the will of their leaders. I will do my best to ensure it is. I trust you will join me in that challenge."