



UN-HABITAT

Opening Address by
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on the occasion of the Youth Dialogue on “*I am Kenya, I am Peace, Lets Talk*”, in
preparation for the National Youth Violence Prevention Week.

Nairobi, Monday 4 February 2008

Young Ambassadors and Messengers of Truth,
Colleagues in the United Nations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you most sincerely for joining us here today in these very difficult times. Like a broken heart, Kenya is still bleeding in post-election violence and I ask you all, right at the outset, to join me in observing a minute of silence and respect for those who have lost

their lives in recent weeks. We pray also for those who have lost loved ones, their homes and their livelihoods.

Thank you.

Young ladies and gentlemen,

I know that many of you have come here at considerable personal risk to join us here today. I want to thank you for your courage and sacrifice. I want you to know that you honour us by gracing the United Nations headquarters in Africa with your presence, for as you know, after New York, Geneva and Vienna, we are the only UN headquarters in the developing world. This centre is the home of the UNEP, the agency that works to protect our planet's natural environment, and UN-HABITAT, the agency of which I am the Executive Director and which works for the built environment, or the Habitat agenda, simply to secure a decent home for everyone and sustainable settlements in which to live. It is regrettable that currently homes are being torched, families being evicted and separated, and settlements are neither safe nor peaceful. That is what makes the meeting timely, and your presence here is therefore most valuable and important.

I am afraid the challenges facing this country mean that this global UN head quarters is not functioning optimally, so our work in other parts of the world is also adversely impacted. The UN is also keen that we overcome these problems soon both for the sake of the Kenyan people but also for all other peoples in the world for whom we serve from here.

As young people, it is your generation which must lead us into a peaceful future. It is your generation which must set a new example for others to follow. You must be the agents of change who direct us along new roads to peace where our generation has clearly failed. We apologize for this failure but as you will see, some of the causes are historical, with long roots and do not render themselves to straight forward solutions. Indeed, it is clear that some need the vigour and courage of your younger generation to be tackled. In this regard, the current cloud hanging over this nation is not only a threat, but also an opportunity. If corrective measures are taken, a new order is bound to emerge in this country turning adversity into opportunity. This way the dead and suffering will not have perished in vain.

As you know, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon was here last week. His message was very clear and let me simply reiterate it. He implored Kenyans to stop violence and killing each other. He urged all of you to go out and to reach out to your friends, and urge everyone they know to stop all the violence, the attacks, the revenge attacks, the burning of churches, homes and businesses, and to bring a quick end to the rape and pillage. That rape is also part of this violence only goes to underscore how wrong it is to resort to violence to settle political grievances. Criminal elements take advantage of violence to attack innocent victims thus turning away would be sympathizers in what you believe as your cause!. In due course, prolonged violence is a spoiler since it makes the public to forget the issue or grievance and to focus on the

crime, as the immediate challenge. How can raping a young girl address an election grievance! By now it is clear to all of us that this is not the best way to go.

And this is not the Kenya we know and love. Apart from the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, his predecessor, Mr. Kofi Annan and the very distinguished members of the Mediation Panel Former President of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa and former South African First Lady, Graca Machel, as well as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, President Kufuor of Ghana, in his capacity as Chairman of the AU, and President Museveni of Uganda who is also chair of the East African community, have all spent many sleepless nights trying to help find a lasting peaceful solution to this crisis. Many concerned citizens have likewise done the same. They have not lost an opportunity in recent days to urge the country's leaders to stop pointing fingers at each other and instead focus on settling their differences peacefully, quickly and decisively so that the violence can stop, and life can resume to normal. At this stage I can only congratulate the Government and the ODM leadership for taking the mediation exercise seriously and engaging in dialogue. I am convinced that soon we shall be in reconstruction and leave destruction behind us. It is painful to see Kenya, the celebrated all time host of refugees now grappling with IDPs. UNHCR is now resettling Kenyan refugees in neighboring countries!

Young friends,

On this very day in 1913 one of the most courageous women heroes, the late Rosa Parks, was born in Alabama in the United States. Some of you may not know of Rosa Parks. Briefly, if you read the history of the civil rights movement in the US, you will discover that some 52 years ago Rosa defied the segregation laws of the South by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. She was taking the next step on her own long road to freedom. And it was an extremely risky step to take at the time in the heated political atmosphere.

But guided by courage and principle she ushered in a new era. Many people are not aware that Martin Luther King Jr. became active as a follow up and in reaction to the commotion set in force by the act of Rosa Parks. She did not hit anyone. She simply refused to give up her seat. Led by Martin Luther, many other African Americans followed her example, and boycotted the bus company as long as they were being discriminated against. But in all this they avoided violence, although they were surely tear gassed several times! They went for principled protest based on the values of TRUTH, PEACE, LOVE for Neighbor and Non-violence. They refused to be intimidated into retaliatory violence. In other words they lost the battle to win the war. It was not easy, but in the end, it worked. It was so effective that it opened the eyes of the whole American people to the injustice and absurdity of the system. Today is hard to believe that such injustice had existed for so long and was vehemently defended! Throughout the struggle, Martin Luther King never tired to extol his followers that the dream would finally come true. It did, he transformed America and the world. Although he was assassinated for his heroic efforts after winning a Nobel Peace Prize, this crime on his person by his misguided detractors proved self defeating. Ironically, it was the very

murder of Martin Luther King that energized the civil rights movement and ushered in a new era in race relations in America. So he did not die in vain. Let us also make sure that those who have lost their lives, do not do so in vain. The current crisis is pregnant with opportunity for a new Kenya, a new society, that will shine again on the world stage. A unified new country that looks beyond parochial, ethnic interests.

An example is closer to home. You must be familiar with the legendary resistance of Mr. Nelson Mandela and his ANC colleagues. Actually, around the same time that Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King were struggling against racial discrimination in America, leaders such as the first South African Nobel Laureate, the late Mr. Albert Luthuli, were doing the same in South Africa. They founded the African National Congress, ANC in 1912. Later on, it was to be led by Nelson Mandela, who was jailed for 27 years for his struggle. Like the civil rights movement in America, the ANC is also founded on the principles of nonviolence. It took them time including long prison sentences to achieve what they wanted, but finally, they won, through a political settlement. You have seen the kind of respect that Mr. Mandela commands around the world. In fact his wife, Mrs. Graca Machel, is one of the Eminent Africans now helping Kenya to resolve the current problems through a political settlement. Another legendary figure is Mahatma Gandhi. He was able to fight for the independence of India, the biggest and most valued colony of Britain by peaceful means! He was visionary enough to see the futility of a military struggle against a powerful colonial master! By now the limits of force and violence are becoming more and more clearer. Also today, we know the power of the TRUTH and RECONCILIATION commissions in peace building. It would be a logical follow up to the political settlement, to allow the nation to leave the problems behind and move on.

I have gone through these historical examples, to drive home a point that young Kenyans can and must learn from Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. All fought for rights and justice, but peacefully without endangering the lives of their neighbors or anyone else. All religious teachings abhor violence because clearly, those who live by the sword, will also die by the sword. It is self-defeating.

Today, young people are considered violent, or at least perceived to be so. I do not share this view. Considering that 60% of the population in this country is under 30, the majority of this young population is peaceful and non-violent. But it is the small violent minority who are the most visible and who are giving young people a bad name. Look at the damage experienced in the course of post-election violence. It has already caused many deaths, displaced thousands and dented the image of this country in virtually every corner of the world! The economy has not been spared. This means the impact will spill over practically to every Kenyan, cutting both individual and public budgets.

It is incumbent upon you that you work hard to change this wrong impression and image of the Kenyan youth! You are not agents of loot and destruction as the TV images have been showing in the past month! Most of you are not members of the criminal gangs that have been terrorizing the community even before the elections. Over all these years, you have been known all over the world for your sportsmanship! Here you were a pride of

Africa. I for one have always looked with pride for the Kenyan runners bearing a flag for Africa. I used to say with pride and conviction that “KARIBU KENYA, HAKUNA MATATA”. I would hate now to say the reverse, “matata mengi”. That should not and cannot be allowed to continue!

This is best done by reaching out to all young people, including those who have lost hope and involved themselves in anti social behaviour. It is not too late for anyone. The violent groups have become impatient, and believe that by taking the law in their own hands, they will find a short cut to solve their perceived problems. Regrettably, violence does not solve any problem. It creates a vicious circle of violence, and make things much worse. This is easy to see, for example, imagine Kenya before the violence and where it is now? Everyone is worse off as a result of the violence that followed the announcement of the Presidential results.

So, today, I would like to encourage you to understand and observe one of the most important principles of the UN. That is to solve disputes through negotiations, by peaceful means, without interfering in other people’s basic human rights.

As you know the United Nations was founded in 1945 after the Second World War with its untold suffering and loss of millions of lives all over the world. Even Kenyan soldiers were not spared. They were part of the King’s African Rifles, fighting in a war the cause of which they did not understand. That is the nature of conflict, violence and war. It becomes a tide sweeping away everyone and everything. From this experience, the UN Charter guarantees individual rights and freedoms through which grievances can be aired and addressed peacefully. The United Nations condemns violence. It also recognizes that if you deny people freedom of assembly and freedom to express themselves, they resort to violence. It follows that the UN principles must be upheld by all of us, both as individuals or groups, or government officials. If these fundamental rights are not upheld, no one will win, but everyone will lose. In order to turn the current situation around, it is important that all parties and all Kenyans follow these basic international principles and values to resolve the current dispute and conflicts. It is also clear that both immediate and long standing historical grievances must be addressed, once and for all. The UN family is active in practically all these areas and stands ready to assist if and as requested.

Around the world today, we know that poverty, a lack of opportunity and displacement caused by internal country conflicts have pushed some 50 million young people towards a more dangerous and unfortunate means of earning a living. Kenya is one of the countries with high degree of inequality. This is unsustainable and must be addressed. A number of you are from Kibera and Mathare and other neighborhoods where we have programmes. You have heard me and my colleagues say this before. That we fight poverty but not the poor, and that we are against slums and not slum dwellers. We work with the Government through the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme. The entire UN family was looking forward to continue with our poverty alleviation programmes along the Millennium Development Goals in all these areas. Regrettably now we have to spend most of our time on humanitarian work. This is very important and you know that the UN family is now focused on this aspect. However, resources that would have gone for

development work will be diverted to save lives and reconstruct. You will therefore understand why I say, violence has affected all of us adversely.

In this regard, responding to young people who wanted to deliver immediate relief and longer term peace building activities, UN-HABITAT has entered into partnership with Kenya Red Cross to make this possible. I am told that a number of you present here are involved in these initiatives. I thank you for your voluntary spirit and is counting on good performance, serving others with sincerely and sacrifice.

At this gathering here today, we have an opportunity to exchange views and learn from one another. This gathering of young people from all corners of Kenya is going to be a peaceful one! Everyone here is unique and a resource. Imagine how boring this meeting would be if you had not all come to participate! No man is an island, so the saying goes! **AT THIS STAGE, LET ME ASK YOU to pose for a moment, and EXTEND TO EACH OTHER A HAND SHAKE, as a sign of peace.Thank you!**

With this gesture, I am pleased to launch and embark on a National Campaign to reach out to each and every young person at the neighborhood or school level with the message of right action through truth telling, peace, love, and nonviolence. These values if embraced will guarantee inclusiveness, safe neighborhoods and good governance at all levels. We will do this through a Peace Building Training of Trainers programme, a Media outreach, and a one to one signature campaign to reach out to one million young people. This Campaign will climax with a National Youth Violence Prevention Week from 23rd February to 1st March where you and I will be called to act on violence in whatever small or big way – be it through dialogue with others on the message of peace, or through symbolic gestures to each other in the spirit of peace, love and unity. This Week will from now henceforth become an annual event within the calendar of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework to Kenya on Safer Cities. In this regard, I wish to extend my appreciation to UNICEF, UNODC, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNAIDS and other UN agencies for joining UN-HABITAT to make this process a truly UN supported initiative for the people of Kenya. I am aware that the UN family is finalizing a longer term “Young people and Armed Violence Prevention Programme” in which Kenya will be one of the beneficiaries.

Building on today’s event, 250 young people will benefit from a training programme on peacebuilding and transformation. This skills building programme sees young people as agents of peace, it focuses on long-term solutions and interventions. The programme’s ultimate goal is to reach young people at the grass roots level.

You also have to work hard, and we are here to support you in turning that image around, to quash that image as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Asia, Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet, author, songwriter, painter and educator who won the Nobel Literature Prize in 1913, used the phrase "*unity through*

diversity" to celebrate diversity and its potential for development. This phrase has later been adopted by others all over the world to emphasise that diversity is strength. Our great sons of Africa, Mr. Mandela and Kofi Annan, hold the same views. And do not forget that Kenya is the first African country to produce a woman Nobel Peace Laureate, Prof. Wangari Maathai. You have seen the truthfulness and courage with which she has approached the issues confronting this nation, under very difficult circumstances. She is a true messenger of truth.

I conclude these remarks by asking you to ask yourselves how a country can grow and flourish beyond its borders, when it cannot even embrace its own people living on her lands? My challenge to you is to go out to your school, to your neighbour with the message that violence is not an acceptable part of how individuals should treat each other. Surely, grievances must be tackled, wrong actions must be pointed out, and those involved named and shamed? But clearly that does not happen after you have killed your neighbor, torched their homes, or thrown them out of their jobs. That is not reason but madness. So please go out with the messages "*Peace begins with you and me*", "*No more violence, lets talk*", "*A peaceful Kenya begins with me*", "*I am Kenya, I am Peace, Lets Talk*". "*The children are crying, this is shameful on all of us*". You are my brother, I am your sister, and we all are one human family. The leaders are talking. In their wisdom they asked Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan to come and mediate or facilitate the dialogue, to avoid a confrontation. That takes time and humility but it will pay a high reward. If youth groups want a facilitator, you can invite UN experts to come and help!

Individual action CAN and WILL make a difference!

The choice before us is peaceful and enriching coexistence or no existence at all. The choice is ours and the youth have to lead.

We must stop the bleeding.

Once again, I thank you for your courage and please from now on stay safe because only you can make Kenya, the only host to a UN headquarters in the developing world, safe to live and work in.

Finally, you will notice that I have delivered my speech in Kiswahili because I want not only the youth but also their parents, wherever they are in Kenya, to understand what we are saying. I welcome them to join you in the goals I believe you are here to set for yourself. To build a united Kenyan nation.

UN stands ready to help and facilitate. Together we shall soon overcome. I have a dream.

Thank you for your kind attention.