

**WELCOMING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, HIS EXCELLENCY BENJAMIN WILLIAM MKAPA, AT THE FIRST SUMMIT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES, DAR ES SALAAM, 19 NOVEMBER 2004**

Chairperson;  
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government;  
Excellencies;  
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation;  
Distinguished Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the people and government of the United Republic of Tanzania, I welcome you all to our country and to the city of Dar es Salaam-the haven of peace. It is, indeed, appropriate that we should convene in this haven of peace in the collective search for a firm framework for durable peace and development in the Great Lakes region.

In a report released three months ago, the Secretary-General of the United Nations noted positive progress in the conflict situation in Africa, with only 5 African countries in situations of armed conflict, and very few facing deep political crises. He also noted that most African countries were enjoying relatively stable political conditions and were governed by democratically elected leaders. Africa is undergoing change; but this change remains fragile and needs to be firmly anchored in solid ground for its expansion and sustainability. Today, we are gathered here to provide the Great Lakes region with such an anchor.

I, therefore, want to compliment the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, Governments representing the core countries of the preparatory process, the group of friends of the Great Lakes region, as well as civil society, for having supported and undertaken a comprehensive examination of the causes of conflict and instability in our region. We have before us the product of their work: the draft Dar es Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region. Tanzania sees such a declaration as an important foundation for promoting and consolidating peace; and for reconstruction, reconciliation, development and poverty eradication. We hope that you will all find it possible to agree to its solemn adoption by this Summit.

Chairperson:

There are many people in our part of the world who believe that for many wealthy nations, civil wars and the occasional humanitarian emergencies they cause in our countries, are peripheral to their vital interests and therefore do not pose serious threats to their security. In reality, these wars, conflicts and instability, together with the death, destruction and suffering they unleash on innocent people, have become scars on the conscience of the entire human race. They have also generated refugees and destroyed the environment, while disrupting social, economic and political systems and subverting development within countries and in the region. This

conference is perceived to seek to reverse this painful legacy, and deserve the full support of the international community.

In all parts of Africa, legacies of history abound. It would be unwise to ignore them. Some of the existing problems have their roots in the manner of the birth, upbringing and maturing of our independent states. Some of the colonial laws and institutions meant to exploit local divisions did not prepare our countries for independent nationhood, or for an era of good governance and economic prosperity. The borders they drew split tribes and clans in half, compounding the challenges of nation-building.

But, we must now come to terms with the reality that, after an average of 40 years of independence, we cannot keep on blaming colonial powers for all our woes. We are independent now, and it is our duty as leaders to rectify the negative legacies of colonialism. It is, therefore, encouraging to note that peace and security; democracy and good governance; economic development and regional integration; and, humanitarian and social issues, have become the focus of the draft Dar es Salaam Declaration.

We, the leaders of today, must bite the bullet, and provide visionary and innovative leadership in all these areas. We must put our people and their future prosperity first, not our personal needs and interests. This conference will be a watershed in our credibility and resolve. We must now stop misusing the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of states to mask incidences of poor governance and unacceptable human rights abuses. This conference process must address these issues if we are not to be accused of inconsistency and hypocrisy.

Chairperson:

In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, and in light of the massive influx of refugees in the Great Lakes region, it is inevitable to conclude that the principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of a state can no longer find unqualified, absolute legitimacy. Possibility for intervention must be placed on the table as part of a regional strategy for durable peace and security. States must firmly be placed on notice that the humanity we all share demands that we should collectively have an interest in its promotion as well as in its protection. Governments must first be held responsible for the life and welfare of their people. But, there must also be common agreed rules and benchmarks that would trigger collective action, through our regional organisations and the United Nations, against governments that commit unacceptable human rights abuses or threaten regional peace and security.

Some civil or regional wars are a product of failure of the structures and processes of internal governance, but they have spill-over effects, and can produce unnecessary tensions between neighbouring countries. That is why in SADC we have agreed on Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. All the countries of the Great Lakes region are likewise committed to democratic governance. There is, therefore, every reason that we should now promulgate similar guidelines and principles for the Great Lakes region.

Countries that govern themselves in a truly democratic fashion do not displace their citizens; they do not generate refugees, and are not likely to find it necessary to go to war with their neighbours. They form reliable, open and firm trading partnerships. They offer better and more opportunities for investment, trade and development. They form a reliable foundation for regional peace, security and the prosperity of their people. This is the realisable vision for the future of the Great Lakes region that this conference should emerge with.

Chairperson:

Conflict resolution also entails a thorough, comprehensive and balanced process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, followed by the formalisation of unified national defense and security systems. In addition we must address the problem of proliferation of small arms in the region. All these are costly undertakings and we should not hesitate to ask for adequate support from the international community.

There is also the pressing need for reconstruction and for the generation of economic growth in the Great Lakes region, which likewise requires adequate support from the international community. As part of efforts to integrate the region, we must, on our part, consider best ways to create transparent regimes for formal cross-border trade and investment, including investment in the exploitation of natural resources across borders. With such formal transparency, we can reduce the risk of being charged with cross-border theft of each others natural resources.

Chairperson:

The Great Lakes region has suffered one of the most serious humanitarian tragedies in recent history, including the genocide in Rwanda, wars, instability and the influx of refugees that has overburdened not only the refugee hosting countries, but the regulatory regime as well. It is in this context that Tanzania has called for a review of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The rights arising from this instrument far exceed the administrative and financial capacities of the receiving countries. Constructed on the basis of individual status determination prior to the grant of refugee status, cases of massive influxes such as have been witnessed in the Great Lakes region; have rendered the Convention manifestly out of context. A new regime that focuses on the realities of today, and on providing shelter in the countries generating refugees through the establishment of "safe havens" needs to be given very serious consideration.

"Safe havens" would have a number of clear advantages. First they would contain spill over effects likely to destabilize neighbouring countries. Secondly, they would reduce existing contradictions between internally displaced persons (IDS) and refugees. "Refugees" of all legal categories must be seen as human beings, entitled to the same range of human rights and protection without distinction and discrimination. Thirdly, they would simplify the return of displaced people to their homes. And, fourthly, they would eliminate the suspicion and mistrust that refugee generating countries sometimes have towards refugee receiving countries.

Furthermore, in his report on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Africa, the Secretary-General of the United Nations takes note of

dwindling funds for humanitarian emergencies and the protracted refugee situations in Africa. This development portrays the erosion of the principle of burden sharing. This decline cannot be explained away simply as a reflection of the political significance of these crises, or levels of media interest. Human beings are human beings, whoever and wherever they are. They all deserve, and should all be guaranteed, equal treatment and succour.

Chairperson:

This conference may engender hope and anticipation of the closure of a chapter in our history that our people and the region want to forget. We bear a heavy responsibility and it is my belief that with the solid political will that has supported this process, the optimism of our people will not be thwarted. We can, and should, ensure that this conference will be remembered as a turning point in the new dispensation.

Chairperson, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me conclude by once again welcoming you to Dar es Salaam, the "Haven of Peace", hoping that together we can engender peace, stability and prosperity, in the entire region-from Dar es Salaam to Luanda, from Lusaka to Bangui. But we must invest wisely to reap the dividends of peace, stability and prosperity. We have not assembled here for mere recitals of our problems, but for investing in a better future for all our people. I, therefore, urge that we invest thus:

- First, we must tackle the causes of conflict and instability head-on. We have to come to terms with our history, and our legacy. Let us not pretend there are no problems, and let us stop finding scapegoats.
- Second, we have to agree on basic principles and guidelines for democratic good governance within our countries and for peaceful coexistence between countries. We must then commit ourselves to stick to those principles the way a stamp sticks to a letter until it reaches its final destination.
- Third, we must agree to work together, in smart partnership, for the development of the entire sub-region and for mutual and balanced benefit, not at the expense of each other.
- Fourth, our borders are artificial and at times ridiculous. But we must respect them, even as we find innovative ways for higher levels of cooperation and integration. As a number of our tribes straddle the borders we share, we also need to have systems of national identity cards that will facilitate movement of our people, with sufficient safeguards against victimization and harassment.
- Fifth, we must commit ourselves to being proactive partners in finding and implementing solutions to our problems; and we must have firm commitments, and timed and measurable goals in that regard, breach of which must have clearly spelt out consequences. The Inter-Ministerial Committee must bear this in mind as they prepare the draft protocols and programmes of action to be agreed upon next year at the second summit.

Chairperson:

Time is not on our side, and the prize at the end of this process is too good to be missed. Let us get on with it, with resolution. As the proverb from Uganda has it, "The hunter in pursuit of an elephant does not stop to throw stones at birds." Neither should we.

And, confident that we are all ready, able and willing to make these political investments for the future, I wish this Summit great success.

I thank you for your kind attention.