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José Manuel Durão Barroso President of the European Commission Peace, prosperity and partnership – the European Union's relations with Africa Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory South Africa, 16 September 2011

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José Manuel Durão Barroso

President of the European Commission

Peace, prosperity and partnership – the European Union's relations with Africa

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Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory

South Africa, 16 September 2011

Mr de Klerk,

Mr. Verne Harris,

Professor Ndebele

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you here today at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Memory to debate the European Union's relations with Africa.

I first met Nelson Mandela 21 years ago at the time of Namibia's independence, just a few years after I first met Mr De Klerk.

In both men there existed a transformational potential, which became a partnership the world would witness with admiration during the birth of the new South Africa.

Nelson Mandela represents the importance of upholding universal values and the power of building bridges as a way to bring those values to life. Both his example and the statesmanship and sense of responsibility of Frederick De Klerk remain a source of inspiration, a guiding light in troubled times.

Neither Africa nor Europe is a stranger to the hope and uncertainty of the struggle for freedom. In Europe viable and peaceful nation states took centuries to form. In the past century, whether we think of the World Wars, the wave of independence that swept through Africa from 1956, or the end of military dictatorship and communism in Europe through the 1970s and 1980s, the road to freedom has frequently been bumpy but rewarding.

And throughout these struggles emerges one eternal truth. No government that lacks the consent of the people, no government which uses force against its own people, can outlast the irrepressible, universal desire for freedom.

That voice of liberation is being heard again in 2011. The Arab Spring is a voice of hope that provides an antidote to other horrors of recent times, like the tragedy of 9/11 we commemorated last week.

These acts of courage in North Africa and the Middle East also remind us that those of us who have achieved democracy share a responsibility to help others win it for themselves.

It was Nelson Mandela – after dedicating his life to the struggle of Africans – who greeted the crowds at the Cape Town City in 1990 upon his release from prison, "in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all."

So when a people rise and demand their dignity and freedom we must stand by them. Indeed, it is the memory of South Africa's peaceful transformation – a liberation struggle that produced perhaps the world's most liberal and enlightened national constitution – that should inspire us in the next stages of the Arab Spring.

My message to all those who stand for freedom in Africa is this: the European Union stands with you as your partner.

Distinguished guests,

Africa has an unrivalled richness in so many domains – from its heritage, its land, its natural resources and – above all – its people.

Africa is rising – and the world must take notice. With Africa's rise come new responsibilities. The African people will be increasingly expected to tackle Africa's problems – be it conflict or poverty related.

In the past twenty years the number of armed conflicts in Africa has decreased by over a third.

With the consolidation of the African Peace and Security Architecture, the African Union and African regional communities are now better equipped to bring peace and stability to the continent. I would like to commend the work of the African Union and of its Commission in this respect.

The European Union has recently decided to replenish the African Peace Facility with €300 million to support African peace and security actions both at regional and continental levels.

The funding will support initiatives in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution, and peace building.

We are sparing no effort to support the African Union's work to bring peace to the continent, as this additional contribution demonstrates. We applaud those countries that have mobilised troops for missions supporting peace, such as Amisom in Somalia. However, more effort is still required. We encourage other African countries to step forward and support the African Union in this endeavour.

Yet, conflict resolution and prevention is only part of the challenge. Too many African futures remain blighted by poverty.

The European Union is therefore proud that the Cotonou Agreement, which governs our relations with most African countries, has been able to provide 22.7 billion euro for the period 2007-13 to alleviate poverty. Through this partnership the European Union aims to support our partners' efforts in reaching the Millennium Development Goals, and in strengthening sustainable economic development.

It also supports regional cooperation and trade relations, in which the African Union is now a major partner.

In this vein, I would like to support the voices in favour of increasing barrier-free trade within Africa.

Enabling Africans to trade more easily among themselves would feed an important South-South dynamic.

To go further in ending suffering, greater self-sufficiency and better governance are the key. Solutions must come from within if they are to work.

In Europe's experience, sustained growth requires good governance. To attract a diverse and sustained range of investors, the rule of law must be respected and transparency valued. Education is key, and women must play leading roles in all aspects of public life.

The EU will continue to fully assume the responsibilities it has taken up.

We already account for more than a half of global Official Development Aid. We remain committed to increasing our aid spending to reach the collective target of 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2015.

Distinguished guests,

Few nations embody the great global shifts of our time better than South Africa.

As the engine of African renewal and a bridge between the global North and the global South, South Africa has a special role to play in these new world orders.

In particular, Europe looks to South Africa to lead the rest of your continent by example, along the path of stability, democracy and growth.

We are seeing the fruits of this renewed relationship already: through continental leadership South Africa has shown in the complex situations in Zimbabwe, the Great Lakes and Sudan; and through your growing influence in multilateral fora such as the G20 and IBSA. It was no coincidence that South Africa won such stunning levels of support in the 2010 United Nations Security Council elections. South Africa is a global actor, and deservedly so.

That is why the European Union places immense value in our strategic partnership with South Africa.

Indeed, the European Union has a Strategic Partnership with South Africa besides the Partnership with the African Union itself.

The establishment of this Strategic Partnership four years ago was a significant milestone in our modern relations. It embodies our shared values and our shared economic interests.

Increased prosperity for the EU and South Africa is at the heart of our Strategic Partnership objectives.

A successful partnership between the world's largest market and Africa's largest market means that it can have a tangible impact on millions of lives.

The true pillar of our relationship is the community of values and our shared goal of a fairer, rules based world. However, it also has a strong economic element, amounting to €38 billion a year. Indeed, the European Union is South Africa's largest trading partner – accounting for more than 30% of trade in 2010. And it goes beyond that – encompassing several other areas: education, health, infrastructure, and science & technology.

The European Union will continue to support South Africa's national policies in terms of employment creation, green growth and service delivery.

We can also do a lot more together in the context of the G20 and other multinational fora in facing issues including of a worldwide dimension, including global governance, climate change, trade imbalances, security and the Arab Spring. The thread that links them all is the need for regional and global responses.

To sum up, South Africa is, and will remain, an essential strategic partner for the EU throughout Africa.

We may not always agree, but our long-term objectives are the same – prosperity for our people, coupled with global responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union must be humble about what it can contribute to Africa's future. Part of that is understanding what we do best, and focussing efforts there. Building strong and accountable governments is surely at the top of the list of what is crucial for Africa.

A good deal of our efforts must be aimed at helping African people achieve that accountability. The European Union values strongly the work of the African Union and our cooperation and looks to South Africa to continue its leadership of the Union.

Neither poverty nor violence can be allowed to stand in the way of African progress.

And as the man who named this foundation said it himself... "It always seems impossible until it is done."

Thank you.