



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE, 21 SEPTEMBER 2010

Message of Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, on Peace Day

Today is the UN-proclaimed International Day of Peace (Peace Day). Every year since 1982, Peace Day has provided a rallying point for the United Nations and its member states, as well as for civil society, private sector and individuals, to join forces to advance global peace. Today, the African continent is joining the rest of the world to celebrate Peace Day.

This year, Peace Day holds a special significance for every African. In recognition of the importance of addressing the problem of peace and security, the African Union designated 2010 as the 'Year of Peace and Security' during the Special Session on the Consideration and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa, held in Tripoli, on 31 August 2009. The Heads of State and Government collectively made the following pledge:

"...We are determined to deal once and for all with the scourge of conflicts and violence on our continent, acknowledging our shortcomings and errors, committing our resources and our best people, and missing no opportunity to push forward the agenda of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. We, as leaders, simply cannot bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans."

Conflict remains a painful reality in different parts of the continent. The human toll is immense, and it is not just the combatants who suffer; in fact, more people, especially women and children, die from the consequences of conflict than from direct conflict-related violence. The economic toll is also devastating, with conservative estimates pointing to a combined economic loss of around \$300bn since 1990 by African countries affected by conflict. Indeed, conflict remains one of the greatest impediments to sustainable development in Africa today.

To improve the living standards of our people and eliminate poverty, we must put an end to conflict. Without peace, we cannot eradicate poverty. Put simply, peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

In the past decade, African leaders have taken major strides to address, in a comprehensive and holistic manner, the challenges of conflict prevention, management and resolution on the continent. Thanks to these efforts, the picture is improving. We have fewer conflicts today than at any time since the mid-1990s; but we cannot rest, and I will not rest, until we have brought peace to every corner of our continent.

Our leaders are unreserved in their commitment to achieving peace. However, the pursuit of peace is not the preserve of politicians, national Governments and international organisations alone. Peace must be fostered through innovative and inclusive partnerships at all levels. It is only when all women and men, civil society and the private sector, join hands with Governments and relevant international institutions that permanent peace will be a reality.

The challenge of achieving peace, security and stability across the entire African continent is clearly an undertaking of many years. Nonetheless, the Year of Peace and Security, and Peace Day in particular, offer an unprecedented opportunity for African Governments, citizens and institutions, in partnership with the international community, to come together and work towards a common goal - PEACE.

Peace Day affords us the chance to take stock and to celebrate our hard won gains, to cherish the peace that we have, and to honour and commemorate those who have dedicated themselves to resolving conflicts and restoring security on our continent - diplomats, peace-keepers, humanitarian agencies, businesses and individuals from every walk of life. All of us have a role to play and a contribution to make to end conflict and to sustain peace.

Peace Day is, therefore, an opportunity for us all - whoever we are and wherever we are - to do something to advance and celebrate peace in our workplaces, in our homes, in our communities, in our nations and on our continent. We each have a duty to make peace happen.

Let each one of us today do something to make peace happen – do something to convince those at war that our commitment to peace cannot be reversed, to make them understand that we will not stop until their guns are permanently silenced, until the refugee camps are emptied by people returning home, and until classrooms are filled by children determined to learn and fulfil their limitless potential.

I implore each and everyone of you to refrain from violence today and to give our children hope for a better future. I invite you all to do something to make peace happen.