

**50TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION FOR THE AFRICA EDUCATIONAL TRUST
HOUSE OF COMMONS; 17TH JUNE 2008**

“Halfway to 2015; Halfway to Universal Primary Education?”

*Summary of Remarks by
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Baroness Taylor, Rt Hon Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for Overseas Development, Commissioner Gawanas of the African Union Commission, Dr Cream Wright, UNICEF's Global Chief of Education, Professor Tomlinson Chairperson of the AET Board of Trustees, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am conscious of a certain personal ambivalence in addressing you following the events of last Thursday. On the one hand the Treaty of Lisbon opens a fresh perspective for Europe as an actor on the international scene. On the other, much of what we already do and, I must stress, do very well, will continue to be done whatever course of action will finally be decided upon at this week's meeting of the European Council.

This is certainly true of the emphasis now being placed on the need to ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This year 2008, is the mid point on the timetable towards the MDGs. The EU Agenda for Action on the MDGs due to be tabled at the forthcoming GEARC, makes it clear that the Union remains deeply committed to achieving the MDG targets. The EU is also convinced that the MDGs represent attainable objectives provided that concerted action with partner countries is taken immediately and in a sustained way. The EU will make all necessary efforts to ensure an action-oriented response before, during and after the key events planned for the second half of this year – and here I refer to Accra Forum on Aid Effectiveness, (2-4 September), the UN High Level Event on the MDGs (25 September) and to the Doha conference on Financing for Development (29 Nov-2 Dec.).

It is in this spirit that I am delighted to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Africa Educational Trust. It is clear that the scale of the problem posed by the need to achieve the MDG target for primary education in Africa is particularly challenging. Meeting this challenge is not just a matter of mobilising sufficient resources to plug a notional financing gap. Rather it requires solid field experience, the careful analysis of the situation in individual countries, implementing agencies which have built up relations of confidence and trust with local partners and a recognition of just which techniques and which pedagogic strategies will transfer effectively in which situations. In all these areas, the Africa Educational Trust has proved its effectiveness and has established a position of being a significant driver of change in African education.

I believe that it is important to recognise that support to 'basic' education in fact necessitates a balanced pattern of investment in the education sector. Without the curriculum developers, the management specialists, the IT people, the educational planners. Without the teacher educators and the teacher trainers, the school inspectors and appropriately trained and qualified teachers, basic education is not viable. If then we are to achieve universal primary education on schedule we will need to source scarce high-level skills and ensure the retention

of those skills in the interest of sustainable sectorial growth. The role of the AET in promoting the university-level training of African students at European institutions of higher learning has made an important contribution to the future viability of basic education programmes throughout the continent.

We must recognise (and here I must admit that the European Commission has been somewhat slower to appreciate this point than many of our Member States) that university education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, provides a unique channel for building bridges between Europe and the emerging professional classes in the developing world. The high level training sponsored by and through the AET has raised the visibility of European higher education from an African perspective and has helped to create links of confidence and even of friendship that have greatly facilitated the processes of political dialogue between Europe and Africa.

I am pleased to say that the European Commission has now fully taken on board the importance of Europe being seen to play a significant role in the development of African higher education. As a first step in establishing such a role, the Commission, at the request of the ACP group, has opened a special ACP 'Window' in the programme Erasmus Mundus providing an additional 150 awards per annum for Masters level training. African students of course continue to be eligible for awards from the 'core' budget of the programme. Of the ACP students who benefit from these additional scholarships, 80-90% are from Africa. You will be aware of course that Erasmus Mundus supports students studying on specially designed two-year Masters programmes offered by consortia of European universities and taught in at least two European countries. A modified version of this 'Window' is planned for EDF 10 for which EUR 30 million has been programmed over a five year period.

A related action which is currently being prepared with the African Union Commission for funding under the 10th EDF is the Julius Nyerere Programme. This will sponsor student mobility between African universities and institutions of higher learning for selected postgraduate courses. The amount programmed for this operation is EUR 50 million.

To reiterate: my key message this afternoon is that while there has been some good progress towards MDG2 worldwide it is clear that Africa, and specifically sub-Saharan Africa, lags behind. However, we remain convinced that all MDG targets can be attained in all regions of the world provided that concerted action is taken immediately. This concerted action must be sustained until 2015 and beyond.

The EU strongly re-affirms its commitment to achieve a collective ODA target of 0.56% of GNI by 2010 and 0.7% of GNI by 2015. The implications of these commitments are very significant. Annual EU ODA is set to double to around EUR 66 billion in 2010. The intention is that at least half of this collective increase will be allocated to Africa.

I must stress, however, that the EU takes the view that achieving the MDGs is a joint responsibility with our partners in the developing world. Without the political will and the real, practical commitment of the administrations in our partner countries in Africa, we will be doomed to fail.

The Paris Declaration stresses the key importance of our partner countries taking ownership of EU and other donor programmes. The Joint EU-Africa Strategy has been designed to maximise the recipient's ownership by being a programme with Africa rather than a

programme for Africa. This has enabled the EU to sit down at the same table as our counterparts in the African Union Commission and for both parties to exchange views as equals on the development of Africa.

The MDG2 target obliges us to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, girls and boys alike will be able to complete a full primary education cycle. In concrete terms this means that places will have to be found for the 72 million of children world-wide who are currently of primary school age but who do not attend school. It should be noted that nearly 60% of this huge total are girl children.

The estimated financing gap between the currently available resources (both domestic and donor commitments) and the cost of providing access to primary education for these African children is some USD 8.3 billion annually. The EU is willing to increase its support to education world wide and to ensure that a substantial proportion of this increase goes to Africa.

But the volume of available resources and local ownership, though essential, are not by themselves enough. Reading the AET's latest Annual Review has served to underline for me the crucial importance of having a range of civil society organisations as active partners in the task of supporting education in Africa. As a leading organisation in its field the Africa Educational Trust has proved able to assess and analyse the evolving situation on the ground, to respond promptly to the needs of its constituency, and to bring that most invaluable of benefits, an education, to a growing number of school-age children who would otherwise have failed to have such an opportunity.

It is with great satisfaction that I note the extent of the recognition that the AET has won for its work, as symbolised both by the involvement of the Right Honourable Minister in this celebration and in the venue in which this event is held. It is a particular privilege to be with you on this occasion, to add the voice of the European Commission to those of the other distinguished speakers and to congratulate the AET on its 50th anniversary and extend the hope that the Trust will continue its valuable work for at least 50 years more!