

# **Blair, Keep Your England and Let Me Keep My Zimbabwe**

by

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His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe  
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Your Excellency, Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa, Your Excellency, Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Majesties, Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, Mr. Nitin Desai, the Secretary-General of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades and Friends.

Comrade President, let me begin by congratulating you and the people of South Africa on hosting this mammoth and yet historic Earth Summit on the Southern tip of our continent. It is a great honour and source of African pride to all of us who live, belong and rightfully own this great corner of the Earth.

Ten years ago, we gathered in Rio de Janeiro, in the same numbers and were moved by the same developmental anxieties that many of us have today. We worried about our troubled Earth and its dangerously diminishing flora and fauna. We worried about the variegated poor of our societies, in their swelling numbers and ever deepening, distressful social conditions. We complained about the unequal economic power that existed and still exists between the North and the South and had historically reposed itself in our international institutions, including the United Nations. We spoke against unequal terms of trade that made rich and powerful nations enjoy undeserved rewards from world trade.

Indeed, we denounced the debt burden by which the rich North continued to take away the impoverished South even that little which they still had.

Your Excellencies, we must examine why, 10 years after Rio, the poor remain very much with us, poorer and far more exposed and vulnerable than ever before. Our children suffer from malnutrition, hunger and diseases, compounded now by the deadly HIV/Aids pandemic. No, the World is not like it was at Rio; it is much worse and much more dangerous. Today Rio stands out in history as a milestone betrayed.

The multilateral programme of action we set for ourselves at Rio has not only been unfulfilled but it has also been ignored, sidelined and replaced by a half-baked unilateral agenda of globalisation in the service of big corporate interests of the North. The focus is profit, not the poor, the process is globalisation, not sustainable development, while the objective is exploitation, not liberation.

Comrade President, 10 years, after Rio, the time has come for all of us to state quite categorically that the agenda of sustainable development is not compatible with the current dominant market fundamentalism coming from the proponents of globalisation.

The betrayal of the collective agenda we set at Rio is a compelling manifestation of bad global governance, lack of real political will by the North and a total absence of a just rule of law in international affairs. The unilateralism of the unipolar world has reduced the rest of mankind to collective underdogs, chattels of the rich, the willful few in the North who beat batter and bully us under the dirty cover of democracy, rule of law and good governance. Otherwise how would they undermine at global level the same values of good governance and rule of law they arrogantly demand from the South?

Institutionally, we have relied for much too long on structures originally set to recover and rebuild Europe after a devastating war against Nazism. Over the years, these outdated institutions have been unilaterally transformed to dominate the world for the realisation of the strategic national goals of the rich North. That is why, for example, the International Monetary Fund has never been a fund for poor peasants seeking sustainable development. Even the United Nations, a body that is supposed to give us equal voices, remains unreformed and undemocratic, largely because of resistance from the powerful and often selfish North.

Comrade President, it has become starkly clear to us that the failure of sustainable development is a direct and necessary outcome of a neo-liberal model of development propelled by runaway market forces that have been defended in the name of globalisation. Far from putting people first, this model rests on entrenching inequities; giving away privatisation of public enterprises and banishing of the State from the public sphere for the benefit of big business. This has been a vicious, all-out, assault on the poor and their instruments of sustainable development. In Zimbabwe, we have, with a clear mind and vision, resolved to bring to an end this neo-liberal model.

For us in Zimbabwe, the agenda for sustainable development has to be reasserted, with a vigorous, democratic and progressive interventionist State and public sector capable of playing a full and responsible developmental role. We are ready to defend the agenda of the poor and we are clear that we can only do that if we do not pander to foreign interests or answer to false imperatives that are not only clearly alien and inimical to the interests of the poor who have given us the mandate to govern them but are also hostile to the agenda for sustainable development.

For these reasons, we join our brothers and sisters in the Third World in rejecting completely, manipulative and intimidatory attempts by some countries and regional blocks that are bent on subordinating our sovereignty to their hegemonic ambitions and imperial interests, falsely presented as matters of rule of law, democracy and good governance. The real objective is interference in our domestic affairs. The rule of law, democracy and governance are values that we cherish because we fought for them against the very same people who today seek them to preach to us. The sustainable empowerment of the poor cannot take place in circumstances where democratic national sovereignties are assaulted and demonised on a daily basis. The poor should be able to use their sovereignty to fight poverty and preserve their heritage in their corner of the earth without interference.

That is why we, in Zimbabwe, understand only too well that sustainable development is not possible without agrarian reforms that acknowledges, in our case, that land comes first before all else, and that all else grows from and off the land. This is the one asset that not only defines the Zimbabwean personality and demarcates sovereignty but also an asset that has a direct bearing on the fortunes of the poor and prospects for their immediate empowerment and sustainable development. Indeed, ours is an agrarian economy, an imperative that renders the issue of access to land paramount. Inequitable access to land is at the heart of poverty, food insecurity and lack of development in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the question of agrarian reforms has, in many developing countries, to be high on the agenda of sustainable development if we are to meet the targets that are before us for adoption at this Summit.

In our situation in Zimbabwe, this fundamental question has pitted the black majority who are the right-holders, and, therefore, primary stakeholders, to our land against an obdurate and internationally well-connected racial minority, largely of British descent and brought in and sustained by British colonialism now being supported and manipulated by the (Tony) Blair government. We have said even as we acquire land, we shall not deprive the white farmers of land completely. Every one of them is entitled to at least one farm, but they would want to continue to have more than one farm. More than one farm indeed. Fifteen, twenty, thirty-five, one person! These are figures I am not just getting out of my mind, they are real figures. So, no farmer is being left without land and there is no one who would want to leave Zimbabwe anyway. So those operations, which are underway of how to airlift those who are threatened in Zimbabwe by the regime of Mugabe, as it is said, are really not called for. We are threatening no one. And therefore, the operations by Mr. (Tony) Blair are artificial, completely uncalled for, and an interference in our domestic affairs. But, we say this as Zimbabweans, we have fought for our land, we have fought for our sovereignty, small as we are. We have won our independence and we are prepared to shade our blood in of that independence. Sustenance, maintenance and protection having said that, we wish no harm to anyone. We are Zimbabweans, we are Africans, we are not English. We are not Europeans. We love Africa, we love Zimbabwe, we love our independence. We are working together in our region to improve the lot of our people. Let no one interfere with our processes. Let no one who is negative want to spoil what we are doing for ourselves in order to unite Africa. We belong to this continent.

We do not mind having and bearing sanctions banning us from Europe. We are not Europeans. We have not asked for any inch of Europe, any square inch of that territory. So (Tony) Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe. Economically, we are still an occupied country, 22 years after our Independence. Accordingly, my Government has decided to do the only right and just thing by taking back land and giving it to its rightful indigenous, black owners who lost it in circumstances of colonial pillage. This process is being done in accordance with the rule of law as enshrined in our national Constitution and laws. It is in pursuit of true justice as we know and understand it, and so we have no apologies to make to anyone. Mr. Chairman, having said that, may I say we are happy that through SADC, through COMESA and through ECOWAS, we are doing our best to sustain our environment in every way possible. We keep our forests, we keep our animals, we keep even our reptiles plus insects. We look after our elephants and ivory. We look after our lions as they roar everywhere. They attract those who would want to see them. We sustain our environment. We are committed to that not just now, but in the future because we want a heritage as a legacy. We want that to pass on to future generations. But we will need support; we want to be friends and not enemies of other regions. We want to work together and that is why the theme of this conference is very important to us. Not only as it brought us together, but we hope that at the end of it, it will have cemented our relations, our oneness to work for this globe, which is ours together.

Finally Comrade President, Zimbabwe has alongside other Southern African countries, suffered a severe drought, itself a reminder that all is not well on our Earth. We continue to import food to sustain all our citizens during this period of drought. I join other Heads of State or Government in our SADC region, in expressing my gratitude and appreciation to those countries and organisations that pledged to assist us.

Mr. Chairman, as we look at the next decade we must honestly acknowledge those of our actions, which have served mankind and those many others, which have undermined our collective wellbeing. Clearly there has to be a paradigm shift from the globalised corporate model to a people-centered paradigm that reaffirms that people must always come first in any process of sustainable development. And let Africans come first in the development of Africa. Not as puppets, not as beggars but as a sovereign people.