

Ban urges African countries to entrench civil, political and economic rights



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon briefs the press following his address to the 18th African Union Summit, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. UN Photo/E. Debebe

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today urged African countries to entrench civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to boost stability and development in the continent.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a promise to all people in all places at all times,” Mr. Ban told African leaders gathered in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, for the annual Summit of the African Union (AU).

He cited discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity as one of the injustices that has been ignored or even sanctioned by many States for too long.

“This has prompted some governments to treat people as second-class citizens, or even criminals. Confronting this discrimination is a challenge. But we must live up to the ideals of the Universal Declaration,” Mr. Ban told the Summit, held in a new conference centre funded and built by China.

“I salute your efforts to build African prosperity and grow intra-African trade. Our challenge is to transform Africa's potential into progress for all,” he said.

The Secretary-General noted that 25 African countries will hold elections at either the presidential, legislative or local levels this year and urged them to ensure that the polls are well-managed, transparent and inclusive.

“The transition in Tunisia has been a model for other States. In Libya, our political mission is helping the new transitional authorities to organize elections and improve public security, rule of law and transitional justice,” said Mr. Ban.

He once again encouraged the transitional authorities in Egypt to guarantee the peaceful and early handover of power to a civilian government, uphold human rights, release political prisoners and accelerate the pace of reform.

Mr. Ban pointed out that the so-called Arab Spring – popular protests for civil rights – took the world by surprise because traditional indicators were showing that the affected countries were “stable.”

“Yet below the surface, there was deprivation, exclusion, abuse. Events have proved that repression is a dead-end. Police power is no match for people power seeking dignity and justice,” he said.

Mr. Ban said he was committed to deepening ties between the UN and AU, noting that the fruits of the two organizations' partnership had manifested themselves in the search for peace in Darfur, in common diplomatic efforts in Guinea and cooperation on Somalia.

“Where there are differences, let us continue to find common ground for the future. For example; let us review how effectively and how quickly we are able to respond to crises,” he said.

He called for joint efforts between the UN and AU to improve the lot of women and youth in Africa, who account for 80 per cent of the continent's population, pointing out that the presence of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who won the Nobel Peace Prize last year, at the Summit was an indication that women are not only victims of war. “They are also champions of peace,” said the Secretary-General.

He called for greater representation of women in parliaments across Africa, which he said currently stands 20 per cent on average.

“We must ensure that women are fully represented in decision-making bodies, including in Egypt and Tunisia, where they played a role” in the recent pro-democracy protests.

“And we must restore hope and a better future for youth in Africa. Unemployment and poverty feed chronic instability and create tensions. I intend to appoint a special representative for youth, who will open dialogue with young people and lead our efforts,” he added.

On the sidelines of the Summit, Mr. Ban had separate meetings with the leaders of African countries, including Salva Kiir, the President of South Sudan with whom he discussed several issues, including the country's new institutions and the constitutional review process.

Issues relating to post-independence arrangements also came up for discussion, including dispute over the transportation of oil produced in South Sudan through neighbouring Sudan, and the need for a quick resolution of the Abyei dispute. The Secretary-General reiterated the continued engagement of the UN in peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan.

At a news conference on the sidelines of the Summit, Mr. Ban voiced concern over the deteriorating relations between Sudan and South Sudan.

“It has become a major threat to peace and security across the region. It is the responsibility of the African Union – and its international partners, including the UN – to intensify common efforts to resolve outstanding issues and build confidence between the two countries,” Mr. Ban told reporters.

“The longer these issues remain unresolved, the greater the tensions will grow. The international community needs to act, and it needs to act now,” he said.

Mr. Ban's meeting with Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki centred on developments in Somalia, including support to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the AU peacekeeping force in Somalia (AMISOM), as well as efforts to combat maritime piracy in the Indian Ocean. He thanked the Kenyan Government for hosting a large number of refugees from Somalia.

The Secretary-General also met with the Libyan Prime Minister, Abdurrahim el-Keib, and voiced his support for the interim Government's work. They also discussed the security situation in the country and reintegration plans for former fighters, as well as plans to improve conditions of detention.

Mr. Ban's meeting with President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, the AU current chairman, focused on de-escalating inter-community tensions. They also discussed cross-border challenges affecting the central African sub-region, including the growing threat of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and the need for enhanced efforts against insurgents of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The Secretary-General also met with the Presidents of Tunisia, Moncef Marzouki, Francois Bozizé of the Central African Republic, as well as Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior of Guinea-Bissau. He also conferred with Presidents Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria and Idris Déby of Chad.

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