

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**ADDRESS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON PEACE, SECURITY, DEMOCRACY  
AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION  
Dar es Salaam, 19 November 2004**

President Mkapa,  
Distinguished heads of state and government,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government and people of Tanzania, and to you, President Mkapa, for hosting this crucially important conference.

President Mkapa, you merit special recognition. Your longstanding commitment to peace, security and development in this region is well-known to all of us. And you have worked tirelessly to keep several peace processes on track, and to guide the preparatory process for this conference. You should be proud of the role you have played in bringing us all to this historic juncture.

I would also like to thank President Obasanjo and Chairman Konare for their leadership of the African Union, and for the strong support they have given to this conference and to the wider cause of African peace, unity and self-sufficiency.

Let me also thank President Mbeki for his tireless efforts to bring peace to the region.

This conference also owes much to the countries and international organizations that make up the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes region. They have provided invaluable political, diplomatic, technical and financial support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Great Lakes region has the potential to be an African powerhouse. Its people are dynamic. Its natural resources run the gamut, from materials needed by older smokestack industries, to those at the centre of the information economy and at the forefront of medical research. The states of the region, if given a chance to control and develop their own resources, could compete successfully in global markets. And, if we achieve stability and peace, and build basic infrastructure, the region's cultural diversity and ecological riches could attract large numbers of tourists.

Yet for decades the region has remained largely impoverished, its political and economic development stunted, its peoples' talents repressed. Decades of misrule often denied the peoples of the Great Lakes region their freedoms, spread mistrust among them, and sowed doubt about the very concept of good government. Instead of boosting the region's health and well-being, its resources enriched small elites and their followers. Conflicts erased many development gains,

and made it easier for diseases such as AIDS to spread. Finally, genocide plunged the region into absolute horror, the repercussions of which are still very much with us. The Great Lakes region, in short, has been blighted by an appalling toll of death and destruction for as long as most of us can remember.

The resilience of its people is all the more miraculous. They have never stopped believing in a better future. They have refused to turn their backs on coexistence. They continued to believe that, given half a chance, democracy and development would take root.

Today, they at last see a glimmer of hope. The region's leaders have made a strategic decision to pursue peace. Ordinary people and civil society groups have mobilized to provide vital services and to press for transparent, accountable governance. The international community has pledged to fulfil its responsibilities. And the United Nations has marshalled its entire machinery -- peacekeeping, humanitarian, and developmental.

So we come together in a spirit of shared purpose and with a common vision. This conference builds on several national peace processes. These have gradually built confidence, and have now reached a level of maturity that allows us to move to the next stage – to promote constructive regional cooperation.

Indeed, any national peace process or development strategy that does not address the region's cross-border challenges will be incomplete at best, and remain vulnerable to reversal. One of the striking features of the region is the extent to which the security and stability of its countries are interlinked. Even relatively peaceful countries cannot remain unaffected by turmoil among their neighbours. Our task now is to reverse that dynamic, and make peace, instead of conflict, contagious and mutually reinforcing.

That is why this conference has adopted an all-inclusive approach to participation, going well beyond the strictly geographical scope of the Great Lakes region to encompass all countries whose contributions are necessary to long-lasting peace, stability and development.

That approach has also meant bringing together not only Governments, but also trade unions, churches, and grass-roots movements of women and young people.

All this is very encouraging. But our objective is bolder. The framework provided by this conference must be used to tackle the full range of cross-border issues.

We have seen, for example, that ethnic confrontation in one country can have an impact on another. So we need to ensure that no state, in future, plays host to those who have sown violence and bloodshed in neighbouring countries, or plan to do so in the future.

We have often been unable to prevent massive displacements of innocent people within the region, or to halt abuses inflicted on refugees and internally displaced persons.

We have seen how the presence of large refugee populations, often generated by ethnic strife, strains local resources and creates tensions with local populations.

And we have seen how cross-border migration has led various groups to settle in neighbouring countries, creating tensions over land, jobs and status. We need to address the plight of these populations.

We need to improve security in the largely lawless borderlands, so as to combat arms trafficking and clamp down on the illegal trade in natural resources.

These and other issues can only be confronted through much stronger regional cooperation, between leaders committed to work together for the long term, rather than engage in shifting alliances against each another.

This is an admittedly broad agenda. But just as participation in this process must be all-inclusive, so must the agenda. Everything is linked.

Excellencies,

The Declaration you are to adopt is a major step forward. Coming a few years after a bloody conflict in which several of your countries were involved, it symbolizes a newfound political will to adhere to fundamental principles, to put in place confidence-building mechanisms and to promote a spirit of mutual trust.

I would like to congratulate you on recognizing, at the highest political level, your region's shared fate, your responsibility to address all the hindrances to the region's development. You have declared your ownership of this process.

It falls to you now to transform the Declaration into detailed protocols and programmes of action that will give the region a comprehensive peace agreement. That is an enormous task, but it is within your power to give people hope – by demonstrating your commitment to live as good neighbours; by taking steps to bridge the suspicion gap. What is at stake is nothing less than a new era for many millions of African men, women and children, who have been through a lot, who have buried too many relatives, who look to us not to waver in this effort. We cannot afford to have them write this process off as a theoretical exercise.

Leadership – sustained and exercised in good-faith, in partnership with the international community – can make all the difference.

We will also need wisdom. It seems appropriate, then, here in Tanzania, to close by quoting something the great Julius Nyerere -- Mwalimu – said in the months before his death:

“No miracle is going to take place.... Collective self-reliance is Africa's only future hope.”

I assure you of my full support for this cause -- the cause of peace, development and human rights throughout the Great Lakes region. Thank you very much.