

Your Excellency, Benjamin William Mkapa, President of the United
Republic of Tanzania,

Your Excellency, Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations,

Your Excellency, Alpha Oumar Konare, President of the Commission of
the African Union,

Your Excellencies, Heads of State, Heads of Government, Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to speak as co-chair of the Group of Friends
of the Great Lakes at this first Summit of the International Conference on
the Great Lakes Region. I consider this Conference a landmark event that
marks the commitment of all countries of the region, to dialogue and define
a framework for a lasting solution to the multiple and endemic conflicts and
their consequences the region has been facing. A peaceful future for this
region has been a dream for all of you and us, but I think the chance that
we can live this dream is within reach if we act in line with our
commitment. I wish to dedicate my statement to the people, and
especially the women and children, who face the consequences of war
and violence on a daily basis and look at you and us for taking up our
responsibility and make a difference.



But let me first congratulate and thank, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ibrahima Fall and the Special Envoy of the African Union, Ambassador Bah. This Summit is the result of their impressive efforts and of the members of the Conference, supported by the Group of Friends of the region. I consider our gathering here the celebration of this first phase and the take-off for the second phase of the Conference.

[First Phase]

The first phase has been a constructive process in which major obstacles have been taken away to lay the foundations for a peaceful future for the region through dialogue. But still, we have to remain modest, since what counts are the results that are tangible and make people feel that your efforts, supported by us changes their lives.

The Declaration to be adopted at this Summit presents a vision and includes principles and actions that reflect ownership as well as solidarity and partnership. It shows that it is accepted that building an environment in the Great Lakes Region in which people can enjoy security and build their own futures.

The most important result of this first phase of the Conference is that it has mobilised the region and has shown that political commitment exists.



Therefore I am pleased to celebrate this historical achievement and call upon you to continue on this route and show Africa and the world that the Great Lakes region is turning over a dark page in its history. Your work will be able to change the violent image of the Great Lakes Region forever.

[Second phase]

Although it is acknowledged that we have come a long way, there is still a huge task lying in front of us. The agenda is ambitious, the stakes are high and the clock is ticking. Skeptics may say that the Declaration is just a piece of paper and will not change anything. But all depends on political will for action and implementation. People cannot wait. They have suffered enough. That is why it is necessary to focus on concrete measures providing immediate peace dividend to the people in the region.

With regard to the question on how to proceed I feel that we should embark on an approach with two tracks:

- 1) immediate action to implement existing commitments and agreements, such as the Tripartite-agreement, the Joint Verification Mechanism, the Lusaka, Arusha, Pretoria and other peace agreements, elections and DDR, with priority for child soldiers;
- 2) and the participatory process from now to the second Summit, in which the Inter-Ministerial Committee, the Regional Preparatory Committees and thematic taskforces will formulate action plans and



protocols to create a Pact for Stability, Security and Development in the region.

Furthermore, national processes should be effectively linked to a regional approach. With regard to immediate action related to the Declaration I believe that the message of the Declaration should be communicated clearly in all countries in a similar fashion, reaching all, preferably directly after the Summit. This would already be a visible step towards regional joint action.

With regard to the preparation of action plans I wish to underline the need to come up with an action plan that is “lean and mean”, is feasible and contains a clear calendar for its implementation with benchmarks that are both realistic and ambitious, geared towards making a difference on the ground.

In such an exercise it is imperative that the successful participatory formula used in the first phase of the Conference is maintained. The involvement of civil society, youth and women can assure that the actions in the Pact can count on broad support from the population. This should also allow the population to be involved in the implementation of the Pact, including the monitoring of the commitments made.



Against this background I wish to underline the essential principles of the Conference of *regional ownership* and *international partnership*. Regional ownership in my view is related to the political commitment required to realise the objective of the conference, namely to change the history of war into a future of peace in the Great Lakes region. Based on the commitment expressed in the Declaration to be adopted I wish to reassure you that the GoF and the co-chairs gladly offer their continued financial, political and technical support and active participation, in the second phase of the Conference. I also feel confident in doing that because commitments from the international community will strengthen the basis for the implementation of the Pact on Stability, Security and Development in the Great Lakes Region.

[Closing remark]

With regard to the role of this Conference in building a framework for a lasting solution to the conflicts and causes thereof, I am convinced that this Conference has sparked the conviction of the countries that their own advancement is dependent on the advancement of those countries around them. This also applies to the world as a whole, since our economies become more and more interdependent. The same is true for our peace and security. We have mutual interests and mutual responsibilities.

Let us work together!

Thank you.

