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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO THE THIRD TOKYO
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African development is one of the most important global challenges, and one of my highest priorities as Secretary-General of the United Nations. I therefore thank the Government of Japan for convening this third Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which continues Japan's remarkable record of solidarity and support for Africa and provides a forum for deepening Asian-African cooperation.

Since it was launched a decade ago, the TICAD process has emphasized the importance of African ownership of the African development process, as well as the need for the international community to support African efforts in a spirit of partnership. I am therefore confident that the TICAD process will now be geared towards supporting Africa's own strategy for African development – namely, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The United Nations has established institutional capacity to support the implementation of NEPAD. First steps in implementation have been taken in priority areas – agriculture, health, education, the environment, tourism, infrastructure and industrialization.

There are also signs of a possible rebound in donor assistance following the decline during the 1990s. Meanwhile, more poor African countries are receiving debt relief, and some foreign investors are showing greater interest in Africa – although many are still not aware of the continent's enormous investment potential.

While all of this is welcome, much greater efforts are needed. Otherwise, few African countries will meet even some of the Millennium Development Goals – goals which have been endorsed by NEPAD, and which are achievable if the will and resources can be summoned.

African countries must make bold reforms, and they need to find ways to allocate additional core funding to NEPAD priorities. NEPAD must be popularized at the national level, so as to ensure greater ownership by all stakeholders in civil society and the private sector.

An enormous obstacle is HIV/AIDS, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. As was highlighted during last week's High-level meeting of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, real leadership is required if we are to fight this terrible disease and reduce its appalling costs. Leadership is needed to reduce stigma and discrimination, particularly against those living with or infected by HIV/AIDS. It is needed to draw on the strengths and contributions of all parts of

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P. 025/025

society through broad-based partnerships. And it is instrumental to mobilizing domestic and international resources on a scale far greater than we have so far.

But if the challenges of Africa are to be met, developed countries also need to do a lot more – on aid, trade, and debt relief.

While there has been some progress in making official development assistance more effective, overall aid levels are still too low, and the principle of African ownership is still too often compromised by tied aid.

Moreover, the aid developed countries give is often undercut by their trade policies – particularly by agricultural subsidies. These subsidies hinder Africa's ability to export its way out of poverty and dependence, and they must be phased out. Regrettably, the recent meeting of the World Trade Organization in Cancun did not achieve agreement on this issue. It is essential that progress is made once negotiations resume.

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative has brought debt relief to nearly two dozen poor African countries. Yet there are delays in implementation, and the debt indicators of some countries have deteriorated due to declines in export earnings. A number of other African countries remain burdened by significant external debt. Here, again, there is more to do.

We must also work to prevent and resolve armed conflict and help bring political stability to many countries and sub-regions in Africa. I am heartened by the recent steps towards peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Sudan, among other countries. But, as the recent developments in Côte d'Ivoire serve to remind us, these moves towards peace are fragile. If they are to be sustained, attention and support is needed in many areas: peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, reconstruction assistance, and help to build long-term peace and promote good governance.

Each of these conflicts has amply demonstrated the need to pay attention to the regional dimensions of conflict in Africa. I welcome the efforts that the African Union and a number of Africa's sub-regional organizations have made in this respect.

For its part, the UN system is committed to doing everything it can to help Africa meet the vast challenges it faces. I know that the TICAD process has the same aim. We need to see effective action, from all stakeholders, on all fronts, to address Africa's great problems, and to ensure that Africa realizes its even greater promise.