News Release

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Honesty, Vision, Clear Priorities, Responsibility, Accountability and Perseverance Must Lead Africa ' s Transformation

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- Africa ' s leadership needs clear plans and priorities to overcome structural problems while focusing on inclusive economic growth
- Building strong institutions is a priority
- Leaders cannot see themselves as above the state and the citizenry
- It is time for Africa to define its own future
- For more information about the meeting, please visit: http://wef.ch/africa2012

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 10 May 2012 – Four African leaders at the World Economic Forum meeting on Africa agreed that honesty, vision, clear priorities, responsibility, accountability and perseverance are characteristics needed for leadership today and will be required to lead Africa ' s transformation from growth into shared opportunities over the next 20 years. Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia; Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of Gabon; Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, President of Nigeria; and Nahas Gideon Angula, Prime Minister of Namibia, spoke about the challenges of leadership as Africa prepares to meet the complex issues of today and tomorrow.

For Ethiopia ' s Zenawi, a leader must be prepared to say " no " when a decision is not in the long-term interest of the country and the continent. " We cannot please everybody, " he said. " Africa needs leadership with clear plans and priorities to overcome structural problems focusing exclusively on [inclusive] economic growth. We need leadership with perseverance to continue on the chosen path when the going gets rough. And if there is going to be transformation, the going will get rough. "

Building strong institutions is a priority if Africa is to develop strong economies, according to Gabon ' s Ondimba. " It is important to have one nation with one goal. Then we need to work together as Africans to build a united Africa, but not a united Africa of weak states [but of strong states], " he said. To achieve this, leaders should not put themselves above the law, but [should obey] the rule of law. "

Nigeria ' s Jonathan agreed that leaders cannot see themselves as being above the state. " Sometimes our leaders see themselves and their interests as above the state – and some stay too long, " he said. " You must have the capacity to look after your citizens and tap into intellect and energies in the country and from the diaspora. [A leader] must be brave and bold enough to work in the interest of [his or her] country. "

It is time for Africa to define its own future, Namibia ' s Angula told participants. The challenges are many. " There are very daunting issues as far as African leadership is concerned, " he said. " One of the problems is that there are external forces trying to undermine African leadership. We are talking about transformation . . . but there are basic issues we are still struggling with. Our colleagues want us to continue to be exporters of raw materials and importers of finished goods. We are being short-changed. We want to be treated fairly. We want fair trade – and we must define our own future. "

Young and visionary aspiring leaders are often corrupted when they achieve power. For Zenawi, this is often because leaders with vision are often tempted to be transformed into " ordinary thieves " . Often, government leaders act as paid or unpaid facilitators while others loot their countries. " Our bargaining chips are limited as companies need big returns to commensurate the risk which is artificial, " he said. Other types of corruption happen at the local level.

An engaged citizenry is critical to create an environment where corruption and looting cannot happen at the lower, middle or highest level of government – and this engagement must " go beyond " elections every four or five years, he added.

For young, aspiring leaders, it is important that they can run for any level of office, said Jonathan. To do this, there must be education and engagement. Women are certainly Africa ' s change for success for tomorrow, according to Ondimba. However, gender equality in government and politics will not be achieved through the ballot box – it can only be achieved through democratic structures.

Angula urged young people to find their voice, define their mission and mobilize. " When you do that, senior leaders will listen when you start to speak, " he said.

Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum, said that leadership comes down to four factors: brains, soul, heart and good nerves. " As a leader, you need to be professional and know what you are doing. That is brains. Your soul gives you a direction; it is a compass and a vision. Your heart brings passion and compassion, " he said. [To meet today ' s challenges of] velocity, complexity, transparency and interconnectivity, to remain agile, you need good nerves. "

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