News Release

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Africa needs good leadership for post-crisis world

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The sub-Saharan African economies have weathered the global economic crisis in relatively good shape but governments across the continent must move aggressively to implement policies that will best reduce poverty and boost growth. This will require the role of women and youth in African and global decision-making to be enhanced, according to speakers at the World Economic Forum meeting on Africa.

While sub-Saharan Africa has been less impacted by the global recession than most other emerging regions, the economic crisis still represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the continent and its people, political and business leaders told participants at the closing plenary session of this year's World Economic Forum on Africa.

Summing up two days of intensive discussions and workshops that addressed the short-term economic outlook, as well as Africa's longer-term development needs, key leaders took a relatively optimistic view. They said the continent's resources – both human and physical – leave it well positioned to return to a rapid growth path, as long as governments move aggressively to deliver on their commitments to market reforms, political accountability and investment in infrastructure and education.

"I agree that Africa has many opportunities," said Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa. "The challenge comes back to the leadership: Are we able to see those opportunities and are we able to utilize the appropriate structures to take advantage of them."

Maria Ramos, Chief Executive Officer, Absa Group, South Africa, argued that strategies and policies that can successfully address problems such as poverty, disease, low productivity and inadequate access to capital already exist, but African leaders in both the public and private sectors have been too slow to adopt them. "We are capable of doing unbelievable things," she argued. "We have unbelievable delivery capacity, not just in South Africa but across the continent. We have unbelievably talented people . . . The only thing that stops us is our own failure of imagination and our inability to move beyond theory to implementation."

In implementing those policies, however, policy-makers should pay closer attention to the needs of business, both foreign and domestic, argued Graham Mackay, Chief Executive, SABMiller, United Kingdom; Co-Chair of the World Economic Forum on Africa. While rates of return on his brewing company's African operations are high, there has been relatively little outreach by the region's governments for advice on how they could facilitate additional investment. "There is a huge amount of potential in Africa and we should remind ourselves of that," MacKay said. However, much remains to be done to create a more hospitable business climate, he added.

The imperative to move more aggressively and ambitiously extends to Africa's role on the world stage, asserted Graça Machel, Founder and President, Foundation for Community Development (FDC), Mozambique; Co-Chair, Global Agenda Council on the Future of Africa. The continent's leaders, she said, not only need to assert themselves more strongly in the G20 and other multilateral decision-making bodies, they must also ensure that those gains are maintained in future years. "We need to put Africa in a position where it will never again be marginalized and ignored," Machel said.

Similarly, she added, under-represented groups such as women and youth must be incorporated in both global and African power structures. “Women bring talent, they bring knowledge, they bring expertise, they bring entrepreneurship,” Machel said. “It makes sense they have to be part of the redesign of the world.”More than 900 participants from 50 countries participate in the 19th World Economic Forum on Africa in Cape Town from 10 to 12 June 2009 under the theme Implications of the Global Economic Crisis for Africa.

The Co-Chairs of the 2009 World Economic Forum on Africa are **Kofi Annan**, Secretary-General, United Nations (1997-2006); Member of the Foundation Board of the World Economic Forum; **Soud Ba’alawy**, Executive Chairman, Dubai Group, United Arab Emirates; **Jiang Jianqing**, Chairman of the Board, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, People’s Republic of China; **Graham Mackay**, Chief Executive, SABMiller, United Kingdom; and **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, Managing Director, World Bank, Washington DC.

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