



THE WORLD BANK

A VISION OF DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE ON THE NILE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR
COOPERATION ON THE NILE (ICCON)

James D. Wolfensohn *President of the World Bank*

GENEVA, JUNE 24, 2001

A VISION OF DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE ON THE NILE

K E Y N O T E A D D R E S S
A T T H E L A U N C H I N G O F T H E
I N T E R N A T I O N A L C O N S O R T I U M F O R
C O O P E R A T I O N O N T H E N I L E (I C C O N)

James D. Wolfensohn *President of the World Bank*

GENEVA, JUNE 26, 2001



Mr. Chairman, Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, and Friends,

I am extremely pleased to be invited by the Nile Council of Ministers to open this extraordinary event, the first meeting of the International Consortium for Cooperation on the Nile. Let me say to you, Mr. Chairman, that the task of setting the tone for this event is a very difficult one indeed after listening to the eleven young people of the Nile, because I think they have said it all. Anything that one says after their presentation of hope, of expectation, of



partnership, of joy, and of community, would be anticlimactic. So let us not leave this gathering with recollections of anything I might say, but with recollections of what the children have said. As one child said of the Nile, *“I love him, he loves me, I care for him, and he cares for me.”* What more do you need than that to indicate the bond between the Nile and its people today, and the future generations that will live along that great river tomorrow?

I am so moved by what has been happening here today that I would like to give you my personal impressions and feelings about the Nile Basin Initiative. This is more than just another international consultative group, more than just another meeting where the World Bank, the U.N. system, and others come to work

together with your countries, Mr. Chairman. This is an historic opportunity to ensure that cooperation, prosperity, peace, and inclusion triumph over poverty, conflict, and exclusion in a region of great need.

This is an occasion in which all of us are coming together with a sense of purpose, and, in my case, with a sense of feeling like a mere speck in history. I have been reading many books on the history of the Nile. As we look back in history at this river system and its peoples, as we think of 300 million people drawing life from the Nile today, as we think of the prospect of 600 million people drawing life from the Nile in another 25 years, as we think of ten countries bound together by one

BURUNDI

Réseau de solidarité naturelle

L'initiative pour le bassin du Nil est enfin une concrétisation.

Ensemble, les enfants de ce bassin: Egyptiens, Soudanais, Erythréens, Ethiopiens, Kenyans, Ougandais, Congolais, Rwandais, Tanzaniens, Burundais

Espèrent devenir demain des citoyens paisibles et prospères du bassin du Nil.

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* L E N I L | By Gloria Karuta

of the world's great rivers coming together for the very first time in a consultative group meeting, we can see that your Council of Ministers has taken a very bold step — indicating that the past is behind you and that your future is together.

We in the international community have a chance to join you now, at this historic moment, to lay the foundations for a future of prosperity and peace. We join you in a way that is different from previous consultative groups that I have participated in, because this is not a group of experts coming together to try and sell a program to a group of recipients. This is a case where the ten Nile Basin states have come together and have done a truly magnificent job in preparing for us this briefing document that sets out your program for cooperation. It is masterful in its clarity

and clear in its direction. It is something that all of us would wish to have, coming to a consultative group meeting.

As we read this remarkable document, we are struck by the fact that the Ministers in 1999 said the Initiative is guided by a Shared Vision, “to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of and benefit from the common Nile Basin water resources.” It is marvelous in its simplicity, but remarkable in the fact that your countries have come together in support of this Shared Vision. As we further reflect on this document, we find that not only have you agreed on a Shared Vision for the Nile Basin, but you have established policy



guidelines and prepared a basin-wide Shared Vision Program of seven projects. You then break down your activities into Subsidiary Action Programs for investments in the Eastern Nile Subsidiary Action Program and the Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program. You have clear policies and plans, and an organization that is committed to pursue those policies and plans in a transparent manner and a manner based on trust.

If ever there was a consultative group that deserves support, it has to be this one, because it really does have all the elements necessary for success. What is fascinating about this Initiative is that it does not just deal with the issue of water.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

“Nous, les enfants du Nil, pensons qu’il est temps de bâtir
ensemble en vue d’un idéal commun.

Rendre ses richesses accessibles à tous. Améliorer notre bien être et celui des générations futures.”

Children’s Poems | *excerpt from* **LE NIL** | By Vanessa Bwale





EGYPT

From him we drink, By him the North and the South are at link.

He kindly waters our crops that we may eat.

On his banks the day is sweet.

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **THE NILE** | By Ragy Selim



As the two Ministers started by saying: This is an issue of people. This is an issue of poverty. This is an issue of peace.

I believe that the benefits of the Initiative can go well beyond the river itself. There are clearly direct gains from managing the river together — you can responsibly produce more food and power, you can reduce the devastation of drought and flood, you can protect watersheds, wetlands, and habitats.

By working together, you can reduce the real costs you are incurring from the historic effects the river has had on relations between countries — costs from

ERITREA

Aujourd'hui c'est une bonne occasion de nous réunir afin de trouver une solution aux problèmes de la pauvreté. J'ai appris que le but de cette réunion c'est de discuter ensemble avec les représentants de ces 10 pays pour trouver les solutions idéales à résoudre les problèmes.

isolationism, from seeking self-sufficiency in food and power, and even military costs — diverting attention away from the overarching challenge of poverty.

Finally, as you work together to manage and develop the river and to conserve the environment, and as you build trust and relationships, so other doors will open. Beyond the river, there will be growing incentives to reduce conflicts and opportunities to work together more broadly: to link your roads, railways, and power grids, and to boost trade and investment flows.

If any of us is concerned, indeed as we all are concerned, with the future of Africa, this Initiative can be seen as a microcosm of the challenge of Africa. Four of the ten poorest countries of the world are among the ten Nile countries. In this region

we see great poverty and exclusion. We see inadequate education. We see HIV/AIDS. We see widespread conflict. We see a lack of utilities provision. We see markets that are too small to be developed on their own. We see the need for coming together and for integration in order to bring about appropriate economic development. As the children have said, and as the Ministers have said, this Initiative must move forward while preserving the special culture of the region. This is not an American initiative or a European initiative or a Canadian initiative, this is an African initiative. It is an initiative that starts with the river, but which encompasses the social, cultural, and human aspects of development.

Chers participants, au noms de tous les enfants, nous vous prions de faire
de votre mieux et de prendre notre appel au sérieux.

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **MON GRAND SOUHAIT POUR L'UTILISATION DU FLEUVE N I L** | By Warsa Melles

And what could be more exciting than to bring about cooperative development in a region that is so steeped in history — some positive history and some less positive history, as I am reading in the history books; history that goes back to kings, to pharaohs, to remarkable traditions, to the very origins of our own species and civilization in East Africa, and to long-gone plunderers who have fought over this river, fought over the resources and brought destruction to the area.

Together, we are all, now, a mere speck in this history. Together, we just happen to be here, at this time, at this meeting, when we can make a difference in history. Together, we have an opportunity to be a part of the future history of the Nile. This opportunity is given to very few people. It is perhaps the first time in history

that we have the scientific and the technical resources, the capacity, the knowledge, the experience to come together. And we have more. We have the will. We have growing trust. As the Ministers have emphasized, trust cannot be forced, it must be nurtured and developed, particularly because of the history.

This a remarkable and fragile first step. But less fragile than history might dictate because your nations have come together bound not by mistrust, but by trust and hope. Your countries have already given much thought to defining the way forward, and you are telling us what you need to do. You need to recognize and understand each other's interests and to explore the many ways in which those

ETHIOPIA

Rivers are sources of life: they provide water for the trees and plants;
the animals and the birds. We use water to satisfy our thirst, wash ourselves.

We play in rivers and rivers take us from one
place to another as they go their own way.

The Nile is a source of Life and sources of Hope for the people of Africa!

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **THE NILE : SOURCE OF LIFE, SOURCE OF HOPE** | By Lalee Admasu Simeso

interests converge. You need to bring civil society together within and across borders, creating a Nile community, fostering the exchange of knowledge and ideas, and pooling skills and capital. You need to pool other resources, perhaps even co-financing and co-owning infrastructure for river regulation, power generation and transmission, thereby building trust and interdependency. You need to promote private sector investments and joint ventures across borders. You need to rationalize food, energy, and other production, within a regional and not national context, to exploit comparative advantages across the basin. You need to design and adopt innovative ways of sharing benefits from the river — just sharing the waters of the river will not work alone. You need to work together to find

solutions to conflict throughout the basin — for you know that you must not pass on to your children the legacy of conflict that too many have inherited. And you need to move to action without delay.

These are not things that are being said by an external group trying to impose ideas. These are the deliberations of the Ministers. And if we look at the project descriptions in detail, every line is characterized by this desire to work together for a common future. It is a very, very impressive program indeed. But the Nile states need support. For all of us in the development business, this is an opportunity not only to back a project or to back a program — but to change history.

KENYA

As the mother gives to her children, so do **the Nile waters give life**
to the countries and nations that border her.

Fresh water to drink. Life to the farmer. Life to the fisherman. Power for electricity.

Transport and communication between peoples.

My countrymen and women of the Nile basin, As the mother needs nurturing, so does the Nile.

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **THE NILE RIVER** | By Brian Anyara Emurugat

We in the development community need to come together at this ICCON meeting, and in the consultative group tomorrow, to pledge the other side of this partnership. We must be prepared to work with the Nile states, to plan development considering the river as one system, optimizing the production of food and power, sharing costs and benefits, and seeking to resolve and avoid disputes. We must be prepared to help identify innovative public and private financing mechanisms that might include co-financing and joint ownership of assets across borders. We must be prepared to work with the Nile states as you make difficult choices. If you need to build dams, for example, we must help to ensure that the best options are chosen, that voice is given to affected people, and that environmental impacts are minimized and mitigated. We must be prepared



RWANDA

Nil

Tu es toute notre vie ,

Tu as nourris nos ancêtres,

Tu nous a tout donné

Tu es aussi l'espoir de notre progéniture

Nil

Sois assuré

Tu es tout nous

et nous somme tout pour toi





SUDAN

You people of the Nile

Come together. Come together. Stand together. Eat together. Build your future together.

Dig the sand. Dig the land.

Hand in hand. Green the land. Build the land

The Land of the Nile. The Land of the Nile.

11

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **THE WIND IS BLOWING** | By Banan Mohamad



to build capacity and to build and strengthen institutions, both national and international.

We all must recognize that conflict prevention and poverty alleviation are inextricably linked, and we must be prepared to look for new instruments, if needed, to support development. In the Nile Basin, the alternative to cooperation is unthinkable, with enormous costs for the people of the Basin — and for the rest of the world. We all must recognize that investment in poverty alleviation and cooperation in the Nile Basin is not charity, it is an investment in development, peace, and global security.

TANZANIA

This is what I call it, because this is what it is.

The mother of 10 countries which feed from it

The Nile is the soul of Africa

What would Africa do

Without the Nile?

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **MOTHER NILE** | By Yusra Suedi

This is not going to be an easy course of action because the problems of Africa remain: The problems of governance. The problems of legal and judicial systems. The problems of financing. The problems of education. The problems of health. None of these broader issues will go away because we talk about cooperation on the Nile. They are there and together we must confront them at the same time. But there is a real chance to carve out an island of integrity and an island of hope in the Nile Basin Initiative. By facing these challenges together we have a real opportunity to promote development that is characterized by trust, by transparency, by equity, by the good implementation of projects, and by common purpose. This is a chance not only to change history in the Nile Basin, but to help to change Africa.

I must acknowledge the remarkable work of UNDP and CIDA, and the work that is also being done by the European Union, by the Global Environment Facility, and by the individual bilateral donors. The World Bank is not here as a leader, but as a supporter of the Nile Basin Initiative, working in partnership with all of the countries of the Basin and all of the donors.

This meeting, Ministers, launches your journey, and I know that there will be sufficient support committed for you to take the first steps along this road, with financing for your Shared Vision Program of cooperation among all ten states. As you advance, it is clear that the investments necessary to meet your development



needs, both in developing the resources of the river as well as in linking your countries together with physical and social infrastructure, are very large.

With the plans you are developing, you may need to see investments of several billion dollars secured in the first five years. Over the next twenty years, as cooperation grows and opportunities expand, you may need to see many times this sum. Although today these numbers may seem large, twenty years from now there will be perhaps half a billion people living in the Nile Basin states and together we must face the challenge of meeting their needs.

I commit to you today, Ministers, the continued support of the World Bank. As your cooperation grows, the World Bank will be prepared to underwrite a

substantial share of your cooperative investment needs, and along with the international community, will seek to provide whatever level of financing can be effectively absorbed. We will be there for you throughout this program. I want you to know that I say that with complete sincerity. I look forward to working with all of you.

I regard it as an enormous privilege, on behalf of my colleagues at the World Bank and on my own behalf, to declare this ICCON meeting open.

Thank you very much.

UGANDA


Once upon a time, there lived a family of ten children and their mother.

The Mother of the ten children went on a trip and left the children alone with the tree.

Each day the children got together to decide how to look after the tree. The tree needed water and nurturing to produce fruits on which the children survived. They had to make sure the tree did not die.

They also had to protect the tree so that bad people did not cut it down. Like the family in my story, you also have to take care of the Nile. Protect, develop and share it in peace.

Children's Poems | *excerpt from* **THE TEN CHILDREN AND THE TREE** | By Joanita Kalibala



THE CHILDREN OF THE NILE





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