

Welcome Remarks

*Delivered at the Inaugural Meles Zenawi Foundation
Symposium on the African Democratic Developmental
State*

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Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Rwanda, Paul Kagame
Your Excellency, Prime Minister Hailemariam, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Your Excellency, Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana, Kwesi Amissah-Arthur
Your Excellency, Prime Minister of the Republic of Benin, Lionel Zinsou
Your Excellency, First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda, Jeannette Kagame,

Honourable Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Meles Zenawi Foundation, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for coming here to Kigali for the Meles Zenawi Symposium on Development.

I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Kaberuka and the African Development Bank for kindly sponsoring this conference. I am deeply honoured that you committed to holding this symposium.

The AfDB, under your custodianship, has left behind the near irrelevant role it played in the 90's to become a consequential development partner, a facilitator of growth and an important contributor to the debates on these issues.

I would also like to thank President Kagame and the proud people of Rwanda for kindly hosting this event. The people of Rwanda have done extraordinary things since the dark days in 1994. For our continent, it is not the dark days, but the remarkable turnaround that is peculiar to Rwanda, its history and its people. The people of Rwanda, have, in the words of President Kagame, changed Rwanda's narrative.

I am happy to say that this peculiarity, and the resulting change in narrative, is one Ethiopia shares. No longer are our two nations poster children of famine and genocide. We are now pioneers. We have become so, as President Kagame so movingly stated on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi's by thinking big. I quote:

*"When Rwandans liberated our country — we were thinking big.
When we created Rwanda's Vision 2020 and committed to meeting our development goals — we were thinking big.
When we decided to make Rwanda attractive for business — we were thinking big.
When we invested in a broadband network that reaches all our 30 districts — we were thinking big.
When we became a regular contributor to United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions — we were thinking big."*

Amongst the many qualities and values Meles and President Kagame share, in my opinion, it is their ability to think, to think big, to think critically and to think compassionately that has informed their leadership.

As an illustration of this quality, we've distributed a short speech titled the Case for Democratic Developmentalism that my late husband and comrade delivered at the Association of Ethiopian Economists in February of 2008. This short, if technical, speech captures Meles the pioneer, scholar and rebel. Meles, the scholar and rebel, is manifest in his criticism of the neo-liberal paradigm, where, in what maybe my biased opinion, he convincingly argues that the follies of neo-liberalism are not simply empirical – a glance at Africa's history over the last three decades, and the turmoil now hitting the advanced economies of the west are more than ample empirical evidence of these follies – but he goes further to assert the theoretical short-comings of what still remains the hegemonic economic model.

The rebel refuses to accept prescribed orthodoxy, even when the powerful prescribe it. The scholar struggles most ferociously with the tenets of ideas he strongly opposes. The pioneer uses both qualities to chart a new course.

Both President Kagame and Meles charted new courses that have begun to bear fruit for their countries. They have both been bold and innovative, but not identical. Ethiopia and Rwanda are developmental success stories in no small part because their homegrown solutions have been tailored to the needs of their respective peoples. They are democratic success stories because their inclusive constitutions address their differing histories of exclusion.

In the same speech I cited earlier President Kagame said: *"Our approach is as radical and unprecedented as the situation we faced. The insistence on finding our own way sometimes comes with a price. Nonetheless, let's stick to the course."*

It is my sincerest hope that the Meles Zenawi Foundation will help foster and encourage the type of thinking that is reflective of the pride and talent of Africa's sons and daughters – Meles Zenawi and Paul Kagame have shown our generation it is possible to do so.

I look forward to what I'm sure will be lively and informative deliberation.

I thank you for your kind attention.