

20/08/2001

## Call to help Africa trade

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Kampala

"WE are not meeting here to conspire to rule the world, we are meeting here to survive in this world."

These were the final words of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's opening speech at the Global 2001 Smart Partnership Dialogue under the marquee at Speke Resort Monyonyo, 17km from Kampala, on Saturday evening.

Museveni brushed aside concerns of certain quarters perceiving such a dialogue as a conspiracy against others.

It was, he emphasised, a meeting to explore ways and means to survive in the new globalised world.

Museveni drew attention to the fact that less than one per cent of the total world's business investments had gone to the African continent.

In the automotive industry, for instance, total investment was US\$1.3 trillion (RM4.9 trillion) but only US\$16 billion were invested in Africa. The same goes for tourism, services, transportation and other sectors.

He called on European countries to open up their markets to goods from Africa.

Museveni said tariff and quota restrictions imposed by European nations were the main obstacle to foreign direct investment in Africa and called for the removal of subsidies in Europe so that Africa could trade openly.

Africa, according to Museveni, had lost a lot of time since the 1960s in terms of economic development.

Look at Malaysia, he said, citing the widening per capita income between the two countries since 1960.

Malaysia and Uganda were almost at the same level of income in the 1960s until Malaysia took a step forward in its development policies.

He said Malaysia's per capita income has risen to US\$5,000 while Uganda's is languishing at around US\$400.

While Malaysia depended on the private sector to lead its growth, Museveni said nations in the region had yet to make headway in such an approach.

"Relations between the private and public sectors have not improved," he said, adding that distrusting each other was the main problem hindering the forging of a harmonious relations between the two.

Museveni said the public and private sector still could not look into each other's eyes - with both party being prejudiced.

Calling on African countries to look at Malaysia and how it has developed, Museveni spoke about how Malaysia rose from the ashes of the May 1969 racial riots.

The Ugandan President urged the business community to take advantage of the meeting to interact with other entrepreneurs.

"You should not expect to make money this weekend. You cannot make deals today because this is not a trade fair but you can make money through networking," he said.

Museveni also said he had not changed his socialist beliefs.

"I am a socialist who uses capitalism to develop my country," he said in response to a remark by Global 2001 Joint chairman James Mulwana, who said businessmen in Uganda had benefited from his shift from socialism to capitalism.

Museveni said time has come for an end to the old economic regime where there should only be one winner.

"Why do we need to have winners and losers? Why must somebody win and

somebody lose? And why must somebody have to lose in order for someone to win," he said at the dinner to officiate the opening.

He said the dialogue had not only provided an opportunity for networking between various business sectors but also between nations in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Carribean.

The four-day dialogue is being attended by 600 participants and 11 heads of State and Governments including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The leaders arrived on Saturday.

They held several discussions on the challenges and bottlenecks in attracting more foreign direct investment.