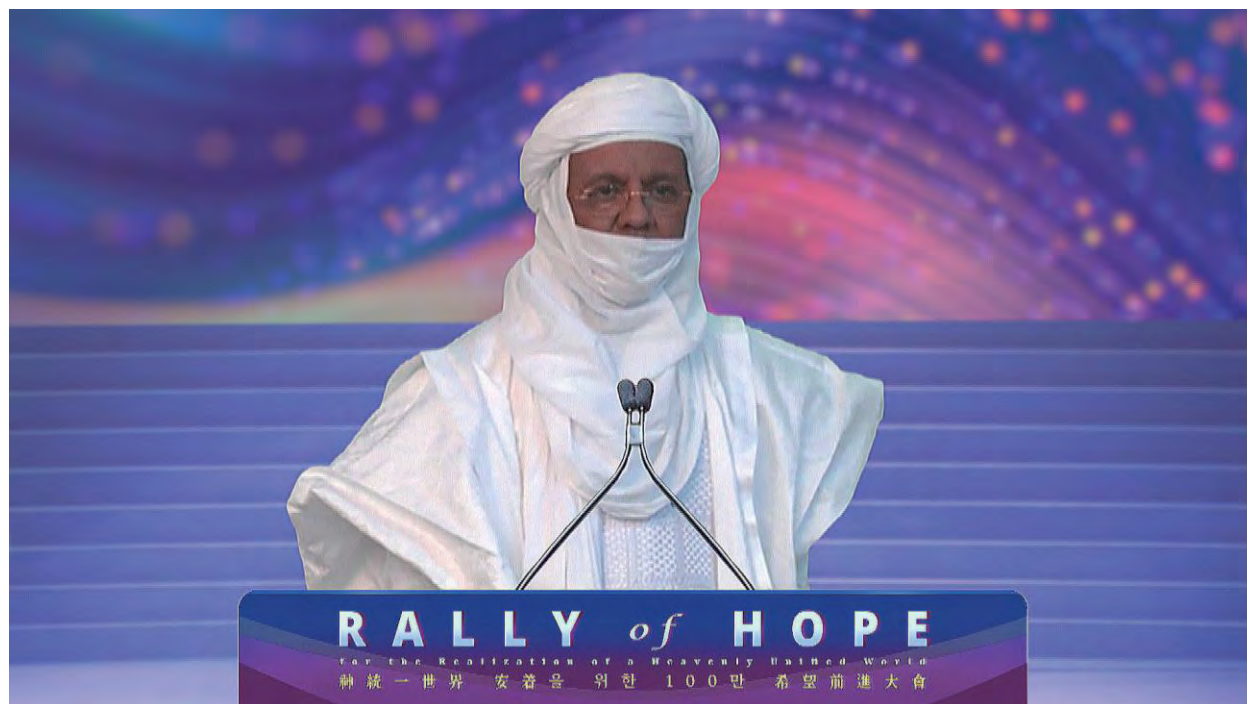


Looking with Hope Toward a New Future

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Prime Minister of Niger since 2011 -- Niger's longest-serving Prime Minister



With great pleasure I am participating in this global assembly of hope on the theme "Rebuilding and renewing our nations in the post-COVID 19 world:

Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity and Universal Values." I also welcome the participation of all these eminent dignitaries representing various fields, who work for social justice every day with determination and conviction, for the sake of lasting peace, without which no development is possible.

I take this opportunity to thank the founder of the Universal Peace Federation, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the Mother of Peace, for this joyful initiative entitled the Rally of Hope, which allows participants to convey messages of peace and a new moral, ethical and spiritual, economic and cultural vision.

This fight is the one led by the Universal Peace Federation. It is the fight for a more just world, a more humane world, a world of a more tolerant and a more peace-loving way of doing things. Indeed, the founders of UPF consider it important today to recognize that living for the sake of others and for the public interest is the basis of development in an interdependent world.

Mother Moon, as you so aptly pointed out in the context of this rally, the COVID-19 crisis has created disruption around the world. These disruptions have not only impacted those infected, their families and loved ones and healthcare workers, but also children whose schools have long been closed, workers who have lost their jobs and companies that have been forced into bankruptcy. The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant impact on the geopolitical balance of power as well as on the global economy. It affects all sectors -- religion, government, universities, education in general, businesses and the economy, families, women and young people, the media and the environment.

Africa's circumstances

Thus, on the level of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for example, the economic growth rate initially forecast to be 3.3 percent in 2020 will in fact be less than 2.1 percent if the pandemic persists until the end of the year, leading notably to a fall in tax revenues and an increase in unemployment and poverty. Some countries -- in particular those of the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin -- are experiencing a triple crisis -- health, security and the economy.

This means that Africa must confront not only the pandemic but also the need for economic revival. This fight on two fronts requires an exceptional mobilization of financial resources.

Before the pandemic, Africa needed six hundred billion dollars annually to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and those of Agenda 2063 -- in particular the objectives of its first ten-year plan for 2013–2023, among which are the structure-providing projects related to the African Continental Free Trade Area, infrastructure, industry and agriculture. These two agendas constitute the great vision around which all our energies remain mobilized. We took a decisive step in the implementation of these agendas

with the launch, in July 2019 in Niamey, of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). For sustainable success, however, and for implementation of other projects, it is necessary to guarantee not only funding but also stability, peace and security.

This is the place to renew Niger's sincere gratitude to all international donors and in particular to the Mother of Peace, Mother Moon, for her financial support for the operational phase of AfCFTA and for the implementation of the Project for a Blessed Africa.

I must emphasize that the scale of the economic crisis that our countries will experience requires financial support that goes beyond a simple debt moratorium. Our countries must be completely deleveraged, and in addition, provided with fresh resources. Since deleveraging through inflation, a process used by rich countries to get rid of their debts in the aftermath of the Second World War, is not an option, debt cancellation must be carried out despite the inequalities it will generate among beneficiary countries.

At present, Africa is the world's least developed continent, particularly south of the Sahara. Its estimated population is 1.2 billion souls and could reach 2.5 billion by 2050. It is characterized by its youth; hence it has an enormous potential labor force, and consumers. The demographic transition underway on the continent will provide a highly productive working population with a strong capacity to save, provided, of course, that young people are trained and educated.

Religious harmony, cultural renewal

When it comes to interfaith dialogue and cooperation, I can confirm that there are universal values that all people affirm beyond race, ethnicity, religion or ideology. In my country, Niger, most of the population shares the Muslim faith, a religion whose holy book, the Koran, professes the brotherhood of all believers through verse 10 of Sura 49 which deserves to be studied in depth and explained to all humankind. I quote, "The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy."

I think it is unnecessary for me to point out to you that we are talking about believers here, all believers! In my opinion this verse contains the entire universal dimension of Islam, the imperative of peace that it professes as well as its reaffirmation of the oneness of humanity.

The president of the republic, Issoufou Mahamadou, and his government are calling on all Nigeriens for a cultural renaissance. It will apply this code of values to three areas of modernization: social, political and economic.

Thus, the modernization we want for Niger is the cohesion and stabilization of the family unit, cemented by solidarity that banishes laziness, idleness, begging and dependence on others. The social modernization that we want for Niger is the detribalization of our society. It is the reduction, in accordance with our constitution, of social relations based on clan-ism, tribalism, regionalism and communitarianism. Ultimately, the cultural renaissance aims to rebuild our country on the spiritual, moral, political and economic levels! This is the Herculean mission that we are tackling with conviction and determination.

I would like to bow to the memory of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Universal Peace Federation, salute the charismatic dynamism of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and pay deserved tribute to all the leaders of this organization. We are committed to making our contribution to the work of the international community for peace and understanding among the peoples of the world. Thank you.