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Foreword

Africa! This huge, diverse continent – rich in natural treasures, rich in a young, dynamic population. Africa – for too long in the past sidelined in the political agenda of Europe. The continent suffered under the burden of slavery and colonialism, still embedded in the collective consciousness of its people and nations. In Europe, the image of Africa has until now been linked with poverty and underdevelopment, with civil unrest, weak governance, and corruption.

This picture does not reflect the whole reality of Africa in our time. As the executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), I had the chance to live for 8 years in Nairobi, Kenya, the headquarters of UNEP. Needless to say, there are still many problems – hundreds of thousands of people living in slum areas, high unemployment rates especially among young people, limitations in the quality and reliability of governance, and a weak and vulnerable situation in all parts of the infrastructure – to mention but a few. On the other hand, I witnessed the dynamism of the young generation, the development of schools and universities, the openness to the world, and the integration on a global level due to an incredible increase in IT and in mobile telephones and Internet access. This young generation is more and more a partner on the global level, networking, learning, and teaching, proud of their cultural heritage while also aware of the gift of biodiversity, of the treasures of the creation.

The median age of the population in Africa is just above 20 years, compared with the median age in Germany, which is now up to 44 years of age. A young, dedicated population is first and foremost an immense opportunity for Africa, offering a paradigm shift in development – a development which will be better and better integrated into the protection of the natural environment, more able to extract its capital without destroying it. It is a development which is not dividing society, but instead is allowing for the possibility of a new middle class, which can stabilize African society beyond ethnic borders.

Of course, to realize this potential is an immense challenge, and it comes with a price tag. These young people, better educated and trained than their parents and grandparents, want to use their skills and need employment which reflects their investment in knowledge. It is calculated that, annually, Africa needs at least 18

million new jobs! This requires investment and a new entrepreneurial spirit. It is necessary to make energy available, keeping in mind that economic progress is always dependent upon the availability of achievable, competitive, environmentally safe, and socially integrated energy sources. In my time in Kenya, only 10% or so of the population had access to electricity or to any other form of modern energy – clearly not a solid basis upon which to realize the “right of development” already enshrined in the “Rio Principles” at the Rio Conference in 1992. The likelihood that the African dream of becoming a young, prosperous, and self-conscious partner in the globalized world will be a reality depends on those investments. First and foremost of course is investment in the brains of the young people, and next is in energy technologies and in a spirit of reliability and future orientation.

This broad-based publication, *Africa's Population: In Search of a Demographic Dividend*, is a great contribution to the understanding of perspectives on Africa and its requirements. This is not a reflection of “silo thinking”. It uses many kinds of knowledge, both to form its analysis and, primarily, to form a diagnosis of the given situation. Its aim is to offer a reliable basis of knowledge, necessary for tailoring strategic perspectives and for implementing them in an open, flexible way. I sincerely hope that this book is successful in motivating politicians but also entrepreneurs in the private business sector and members of civil society more generally to understand Africa better and to bring this marvelous continent into the center of common coordinated action.

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