



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILDHOOD
JOURNEE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ENFANCE AFRICAINE
INTERNATIONALER TAG DER AFRIKANISCHEN KINDHEIT
INTERNATIONALE DAG VAN DE AFRIKAANSE JEUGD
DIA INTERNACIONAL DE LA INFANCIA AFRICANA
....and its YOUTH - IDAY - www.1606.eu

SPEECH OF Ms. MARIEME DIOP
European Parliament June 14th 2007.

Excellencies, Misses and Mister the Ambassadors
Misses Vice-President of the European Parliament
Représentatives of the World
Dear IDAY Partners,

It is with an immense pleasure that I find myself here in Europe among you to commemorate the International Day of the African Childhood. I am 18 and a student in the final year of a scientific lyceum in Dakar. I have a scholarship from the « Forum for African Women Educationalists »(FAWE), which is member of the CNEPT, focal point of IDAY in Senegal.

Today, I have the difficult task to speak in the name of all the African children and youngsters and the girls in particular. I am conscious of the privilege to be able to go to school, to have reached the final year, which only 30% of the girls do, and especially to have been chosen to come to Europe for IDAY.

The African continent faces dramatic challenges: extreme poverty, illiteracy (half the illiterates in the world are African) malnutrition, diseases such as malaria and AIDS.

As Victor Ordoñez declared at the Dakar Forum in 2000 : « Without education, the world problems such as the environment and AIDS will not be resolved ; the long term solutions to all the major world problems is education ». Seven years have passed since this Forum whose primary objective was to give access to a quality primary education to all, girls and boys alike by 2015.

Despite the efforts by the African States, the non-governmental organisations and the foreign partners, many youngsters are still excluded from education : those who are not in school because they do not have access to it and those who drop out because they need to work, have no money or are married against their will.

We must recognise progress made so far : in 15 years, the proportion of African children who completed their primary education rose from 49% to 60% and if the current trend continues, we can hope that by 2015, we will manage to reach gender equality in African schools.

The youngsters, however, coming from poor families, or living in rural areas continue to have limited access to primary education. There are still too many slave children, children of the street, household children, those called « witch children” and trading in children remains a plague in several countries. School books and material are lacking and going to school is still too costly for many. Girls are still forced to carry out household tasks that prevent them from completing their studies in good condition. Primary education remains of bad quality resulting in youngsters coming out of school have no future.

I ask that all African countries declare education obligatory for all at least primary education and invest the necessary funds so that all African children receive a quality education. This concerns not only their own resources but also foreign aid that should go to education in priority. Teachers need to be well trained and paid decent salaries so that they would dispense a quality education that would allow us to reach the same level as the children from rich countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am well aware that my speech is incomplete and that the future of the African children lies primarily with the Africans. I am proud of being African. The African continent is rich. Its wealth stems not only from its land – diamonds, gold, petrol, agriculture, exceptional natural beauties; it lies mainly in its youth.

Of course, your help is welcome, but what I came here to ask you above all in the name of the African youth is your respect for our rights as much as for our values.

Thank you for your attention.

Marième Diop.