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**PLENARY SESSION VI:
BUILDING TRUST THROUGH
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

**Mohamed Ibrahim
Founder and Chairman of CELTEL International
Founder of the Mo Ibrahim Award
for Achievement in African Leadership**



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Good afternoon my friends. I want to talk about two main issues. Both of them are related to Africa, where I come from. I am Nubian, Sudanese.

The first subject is the subject of telecommunications. Telecom, as we know, has been considered an area of sovereignty. Governments consider it so important for national security and whatever reason. After over one hundred years of government control of telecommunications in Africa, we ended up with a situation where a few years ago, in a country like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, there were 3,000 phones for 50 or 60 million people.

The situation is starting to change. It took time. It was really an issue of governments starting to build trust in the private sector, that really by letting the private sector help with its “know-how,” finance, and management to really rebuild the African telecommunication industry. The experiment has been fantastic, and I have been proud to be at the heart of this. We were the pioneers in Africa, and we started that self-help operation about nine years ago.

As private sector people, we needed to really get over our mistrust of government, especially African governments. When we started our project nine years ago, everyone came to us and said, “You are crazy to invest in Sub-Sahara Africa.” I would ask people, “Why?” They would say, “Well, corruption, misrule, all of the problems you are going to face over there.” As an African, I really thought it was a bit insulting. I know that we have a problem with governance in Africa, but I never believed that it is a one-sided problem. I always believed that corruption really is something where business has the first share of responsibility, as well, beside government officials.

So, we launched “CELTEL” anyway. We decided that we would not pay any bribes and made it public. Surprise-surprise, we prospered. We had 15 operations, all in Sub-Sahara Africa, today 20 million customers – very successful operations. We did not pay bribes to any governments officials. But the important thing is, in that part of Africa, we ended up on our own with 20 million customers. We changed the face of the continent, by providing really much needed expertise, capital, finance, and management. And that I think is a shining example, where both the private sector and the government got over their suspicion, the suspicion of each other, and really cooperated to try to rebuild something that is useful for the people.

Africa, today, is unimaginable without a mobile phone. I think that all of my African brothers and sisters here will tell you that we are the fastest growing market in the world. We brought more people on our mobile network in Africa than the total new customers in Europe, last year and the year before. That is the achievement of how when people get over their usual mistrust, people can really built something forward.

The benefit to the government was fantastic: 42% of our revenue was paid to government – that is our total number. I am saying 42% of revenues – not 42% of profits, because besides corporate tax, we pay license fees, air time fees, and all kind of special mobile fees, all kinds of special taxes, 42% of our revenue goes. We are the largest contributor to the treasury in probably half of the countries where we operate. So, that was a good example of cooperation, once we managed to get across ideological lines and come with a pragmatic way to move forward. That said, it has been a great success. The investors decided to sell the company and, of course, we built a very valuable company, and all the investors made a lot of money.

Personally, I move now to the second part of what I want to talk now here, which is what I decided as a person to do, as an African citizen, now that I am almost unemployed, because I am resigning my position in CELTEL, and you will know why in short while. So, I am really an unemployed sort of old age pensioner, and I thought that I really should give back to Africa what Africa has given to me, so I decided to look forward for a way to do that. And I said, “Okay. I do not need this money, so I am giving it back.” But I wanted to give it back in a more intelligent manner. And it struck me – having traveled in Africa, having done business in Africa, having sat with customers, partners, governments, presidents, whomever – that really our problem in Africa is that of governance.

Good governance really is at the heart of our issues in Africa. Without good governance, we can forget about development, sustainable development, human rights, and this and that. Nothing will happen without good governance in Africa. So, we decided to focus on that project, the project of governance and leadership in Africa. I started a foundation that is called the “Mo Ibrahim Foundation” to focus on African governance and leadership.

Our issue is simple: everybody talks about governance, but what is governance? Do we know what governance is? Do we measure it? I am trained as an engineer, and I have been trained not to talk about something that I cannot fully describe. I cannot measure, put my arms around it, my slide rule over it, and define what it is. So, it became amazing to me that with all of this nice talk, all of these conferences, etc, we do not have a measure for governance or good governance. So, the cornerstone of our work is to produce an index of governance for Africa.

We think governance is not a mystery. Governance is a set of political goods that leaders need or government needs to deliver to other people. We need to define what those goods are and to look out and measure delivery. For that purpose, we are producing that index, and we will measure all elements of governance, economic development, education, health, human rights, democracy, and gender. Gender issues are actually woven throughout. We are not treating gender as an “add-on.” It is essential, because I do not understand why – if women work in Africa an average of 11 or 12 hours per day, and men work an average of 4 hours a day – how come men are dominating women? Who is supposed to dominate whom? I see there are some women here. I really think that African women are really the hope to take this continent forward.

So, we set out really to do the things that you believe that neither the World Bank, nor the United Nations, nor the European Union, nor the other Communities can do, which is to speak frankly. Because we are a member of civil society, we are really able to speak frankly, to measure, and publish, and rank, and tell countries what we are doing and also tell leaders what they are doing, because we are going to map each leader's period of leadership on their performance. Then, we need to give these facts to civil society in a very easily digestible form to know exactly what we are doing. Then, you take issues with guys, if you want to.

Before I finish here, there is a five minute movie, which actually articulates what I am trying to say in a much better way.

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

That is why we decided to really energize civil society. This September, we will publish our first Index. I must say that we are very grateful for the help we received from the United Nations and various organizations, especially the UNDP and the people who work on the Human Development Index. Our gratitude to the World Bank, the IMF, the African Union, Transparency International, and a lot of organizations who are really helping us, supporting us, giving us the necessary data. A team at Harvard University at the Kennedy School of Government are really working on that project right now.

In August / September, we will publish our first index. We will give information to civil society. That is accountability, which is very important. Then, we will have a prize committee headed by Kofi Annan, which will announce a winner in October. In November, we will have a big party to celebrate the great success of Africa leadership and that will be in the Alexandria library, as befitting. It always amazes me that we can give the world the greatest library in history and decide that one of the seven wonders is the Lighthouse of Alexandria, but then, how come we are the "dark, ignorant" continent? But anyway, that is life.

Thank you very much.