

**Clean Air Initiative in sub-Saharan African Cities  
Regional Conference on phasing-out leaded gasoline  
Dakar, Senegal. June 26-28, 2001**

**Opening address by Letitia A. Obeng, Sector Manager,  
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Honorable Ministers,  
Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address this regional conference on phasing-out leaded gasoline in sub-Saharan Africa. It is the first, but I sincerely hope that it will not be the last. I would like to share with you a few thoughts on the subject we are about to spend the next couple of days on - working together to help Sub-Saharan Africa become lead free. Let me start by asking a basic question.

Why does the presence of lead in gasoline matter?

Studies have clearly demonstrated that in developing countries, most of the lead in the environment comes from vehicular emissions: vehicle traffic is the largest source of lead exposure in urban areas. I am sure that we have all heard the statistics on how quickly the continent of Africa is urbanizing. Conservative estimates are that by 2025, half of the people living on this continent will be living in urban areas. This rapid urbanization and associated motorization in sub-Saharan Africa together mean that the problems we are seeing with air pollution are going to get worse much sooner than later, unless something is done.

Lead affects our health, damaging organs and having a negative impact on children's intelligence. Those the most affected are the people who work, live or play in the streets, especially school children.. Comprehensive research carried out in Dakar in 1999 confirms the devastating impact of lead generated by traffic, on children in particular. We will hear more about this later on during the conference.

Lead pollution is a silent threat to life, and it has to be stopped.

Who can do this? We, as an international community, we, as development banks, we as national and local authorities, we as the oil industry, as research agencies, NGOs, private

sector.... We as human beings working together, each bringing to the table our own strengths and skills, can remove the silent threat of lead from Africa. What do we need to do to succeed in phasing lead out of gasoline in the only continent in the world which still uses leaded fuel?

Perhaps we can learn from other experiences around the world. What have we learned from the Thailand and Costa Rica? First and foremost, building partnership and a comprehensive consensus through cross-sectoral dialogue, is essential. Second, public information, awareness-raising and education are key. Third, such a program requires a realistic schedule, deadlines and milestones along the way that are clearly defined for all the different partners to work towards. Finally, appropriate regulation as well as price and fiscal incentives can have a major impact on the task of reaching the milestones in a timely way.

A successful soccer team, has all its players working together in partnership, each one has an important role to play. Today we are about to establish a new team or partnership in which all skills represented here will have a key role to play. As we begin to apply the four lessons above, we will begin to grow into a formidable team to achieve our objective.

The World Bank is ready to be a part of this partnership or team. What role can we play and how can we contribute to achieving the objective of lead free gasoline and reduced lead pollution in Africa? In this kind of partnership, the Bank can be a facilitator and a catalyst, assisting Governments: to determine the level of priority assigned to the reduction of exposure to lead; to design and adopt appropriate reform and policies to support the phase-out of leaded gasoline and; to facilitate the implementation of related policies. The Urban Mobility Project in Senegal which is financed by an IDA credit, is a demonstration of facilitating reform of the petrochemical sector and is beginning to demonstrate how to work in partnership on this kind of reform.

I would like to stress the fact that every person in this large multidisciplinary group of participants can add value to the work ahead. To succeed, we need the expertise, knowledge and willingness of every single stakeholder African and non-African. This conference is the opportunity to launch AFRICACLEAN, the network of African experts in the field of air pollution. By growing in membership and more importantly in experience, such a network is expected to disseminate messages, reinforce local and regional capacity and cooperate in building a better future for African cities. I would like to be able, 10 years or maybe even 5 years from now, to look back and see the beginning of the lead-free program "AFRICACLEAN". I would hope to see that the program has succeeded because of a strong network of dedicated professionals and partners who were determined to realize the dream of a lead-free life.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and to express our appreciation of the constructive cooperation already built with the oil industry which has allowed us to reach this point and for their co-sponsorship on the organization of this conference.

This brings me to my final comment : the Clean Air Initiative in Sub-Saharan African Cities was launched by the World Bank Group in 1998 in partnership with many of those represented here today – their common concern - the growing negative impact of air pollution generated by motorized transport. Phasing-out leaded gasoline will be a significant contribution to the work of this initiative, as well as to the work of others such as the SSATP, a long established and successful partnership in the Region.

The way forward may be long and will require a careful combination of technical, regulatory, and institutional measures, as well as financing. But we need to start today working regionally to make the cities in Africa “liveable” and just as important “bankable”, attractive to foreign direct investment, in support of sustainable development and economic growth.

I sincerely hope that in the time here we will develop and share a common vision of a lead-free Africa and bringing our individual and collective experiences to bear, will begin working together effectively towards making the vision a reality.

Thank you for your attention and I wish us all a productive and successful conference.

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