



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY H.E. SALIM AHMED SALIM, OAU SECRETARY GENERAL  
AT THE 1994 BOTSWANA INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR**

Gaborone, Botswana

24 August 1994

Your Excellency, President, Sir Ketunile  
and Lady Masire,  
Honourable Vice President and Mrs. Mogae,  
Honourable Chief Justice and Mrs. Mokama,  
Distinguished Honourable Ministers,  
Honourable Speaker and Members of the National  
Assembly,  
Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Organization of African Unity and on my own behalf, I am profoundly honoured and delighted at the invitation to be here on this occasion of the official opening of the 1994 Botswana International Trade Fair. I take this opportunity to also express my sincere appreciation for the warm welcome and hospitality extended by the Government and the People of Botswana to my delegation and to all the participants at this Trade Fair.

This Trade Fair is an early occasion to bring us in this Region together after the victory of the people of South Africa and the establishment of a Non-racial Democratic South Africa. It is, therefore, an occasion for joy and celebration. It is also an occasion for all of us in Botswana, in the Continent in general and in this region in particular, to devote our attention to the real challenge of development.

Mr. President,

We are here to celebrate the economic success of this country. Botswana has made impressive economic advances in part because of the stable and permitting political environment which the Government policies of accountability, transparency and democracy generally have fostered. Today, Botswana enjoys social harmony and political cohesion based on shared national aspirations of building a peaceful and prosperous country. The Botswana experience in governance and fostering a sense of common national identity and purpose stands out as one which must inspire the rest of the Continent.

Good governance revolves around the principle of equity. It is that ability of Botswana to engender in the nation and system of government a sense of fairness which has been instrumental in maintaining social harmony consolidating unity and fostering economic development. The fairness I speak of manifests itself in the system of equitable access to national resources by the people of this country.

The social services administration and the building of physical infrastructure across the country has permitted access by the people of this country to basic services such as health care, clean drinking water and schools as well as opened this country to investment and development.

Mr. President,

It is this sense of justice and equity which was the guiding philosophy in the selfless dedication of the people of this country to the struggle against colonial domination and racism in Africa. Notwithstanding its size, this country stood firm and resisted armed attacks political subversion and economic pressures by Apartheid South Africa. The people of this country and their compatriots in the frontline and other countries neighbouring South Africa, bore the brunt of the Apartheid acts of destabilization. Now that that sacrifice and perseverance has finally borne fruit in the form of a liberated Africa and the emergence of a non-racial democratic South Africa, we need to take the full advantages which the new opening offers.

The challenge is to see how the economic strength and technological and scientific know how of South Africa, can be creatively made to interplay with the resources available in this region to spur growth and development. Whether within the Southern Africa Development Community or bilaterally, this region stands to benefit by maximizing the political and economic opportunities which now present themselves. This Trade Fair is but one of the media through which intra-regional trade can be promoted to the benefit of all.

It is, therefore, a great honour for me to be here today to share in the ceremony of the opening of the Botswana International Trade Fair. This Fair marks the beginning of the Second Liberation of Africa, the Economic Liberation. The

objective of this second liberation is to rid our Mother Continent of the scourge of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease.

Production Trade and Regional Cooperation constitute the backbone of our second liberation strategy. First and foremost, we have to concentrate our efforts in production to produce more to satisfy the basic needs of our people and to generate surplus to trade with our neighbours and the world at large. To do that we have to be more efficient and more competitive. In this endeavour, we have to diversify our economies both vertically and horizontally to process our raw materials into finished goods and to expand into new production areas to meet the needs of our people and those of our neighbours and Africa as a whole.

We have also to expand the opportunities of trade among ourselves. For too long, we have been made to believe that there are no opportunities for trade among ourselves. We were made to believe, import and consume American Coffee, English Cigarettes and Swiss Chocolates, to mention only a few, when in actual fact these are originally African products. We were also made to import everything from hoes to machinery from outside the continent. This myth is being shattered throughout the continent, thanks to Trade Fairs like the Botswana International Trade Fair we are celebrating its opening today.

Economic Cooperation and Integration constitutes the heart of our second liberation strategy. The trend in the world is of building bigger economic and trading blocs and

expanding markets. This is evidenced in the creation of a trading zone to incorporate the whole of Europe, the creation of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), the creation of a free trading zone comprising some major Latin American Countries and the closer cooperation being established among the countries of the Pacific Rim.

More than any other region in the world, Africa needs economic cooperation and integration. We have inherited from the colonial powers boundaries which we had no say in their drawing. These borders are now part of the political reality of our continent. In an era of global economic change characterized by the building and consolidation of economic blocs, economic integration in Africa ceases to become a luxury but an imperative necessity for our very survival. Taken individually, our economies are too small to allow us to benefit fully from economies of scale and to produce all the needs of our people. Cooperation and integration is necessary for us to exploit the rich natural endowments of our continent from rivers to common natural deposits. It is also essential for us to pool our knowledge, experience and resources to meet the challenges of our Second Liberation. Trading among ourselves across the borders is a key in this strategy.

But to trade, we need first to know what is available in our respective countries, to build the trade facilitating infrastructure and the physical infrastructure to carry this trade. We need to bring the traders together. That is why trade fairs have been organized since the emergence of modern mercantile societies, to serve as a marketing tool. Their

objective is to exhibit tradeable goods, bringing together sellers and buyers for the purpose of forging business relationship, exchanging information on trade opportunities available.

They have further acquired a special importance for Africa because, for too long, we have ignored trade opportunities among ourselves and concentrated on trade with the North. That is why we, in the OAU, encourage and fully support the organization of Trade Fairs in each of our Member States, and that is why we fully support and endeavour to participate in Regional Trade Fairs organized by the Regional Economic Communities, such as the forthcoming PTA Trade Fair which will be held later this year in Maputo, Mozambique.

Our efforts in promoting Trade Fairs do not stop at the level of support. In fact, since 1972, we have been organizing, once every four years, the OAU All Africa Trade Fair, the last of these Fairs, the Sixth OAU Trade Fair, was organized in 1992 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in which Botswana participated actively and mounted a stand which drew serious commercial attention from businessmen and visitors, particularly, leather products and solar energy products. We are currently preparing, for the 7th OAU Trade Fair to take place in Nigeria in 1996.

I am happy to inform you also that we have expanded our activity with respect to Trade Fairs by organizing, in cooperation with the League of Arab States last year, the first ever Afro-Arab Trade Fair in Tunis. We are currently

preparing for the Second Afro-Arab Trade Fair to take place next year in Johannesburg, South Africa. And I look forward to seeing all the Botswana Exhibitors in that Fair.

As you can see, the Botswana International Trade Fair fits well in our overall strategy for the second liberation. Through the years, this Trade Fair has grown from its humble beginnings in 1968, two years after the independence of Botswana when the first Gaborone Agricultural Show and Trade Fair was organized. At that time, the exhibits were mainly livestock, agricultural produce and some imported machinery. I note that the Fair has grown from success to success as witnessed by the dramatic increase in the number of exhibitors from foreign countries and 90 local exhibitors in 1983 to 356 local and international exhibitors this year.

The Botswana International Trade Fair has become a mirror reflecting Botswana's efforts to take charge of its developments and its achievements since independence.

At the time of Independence in 1966, Botswana was one of the 20 poorest countries of the world. Its economy was predominantly a subsistence one based on foreign aid and remittances of Botswana's male emigrant labour force participating in South African economy. At that point in time, there seemed to be no obvious prospects for economic development besides the beef sector which was dominated by a few large scale, predominantly expatriate farmers. Commercial livestock sector was therefore the largest contributor to gross domestic product and export earnings.

Today, Botswana is considered internationally among the high achievers developing countries. It has been able to develop not only in terms of GDP but also in the overall human development index which takes into account longevity of life, the level of education as well as the GNP. Indeed, according to the 1994 Human Development Report, Botswana's Human Development Index ranks 4th in the whole of Africa after Mauritius, Libya and Tunisia. In terms of industrial development, Botswana has also shown tremendous growth. In 1985, there were only 44 licensed manufacturing companies. This figure grew to 877 companies in 1993 and is still growing.

This impressive record of achievements is no accident. It owes a lot to the vision and determination of the Botswana Government and people and to the efficient management of the Botswana economy as well as to the judicious use of its natural endowments.

The Government of Botswana should be commended for having provided a stable and an enabling environment which has been the centre-piece for attracting foreign and domestic investment. The Government's sound economic policies coupled with good governance, transparency and accountability have bolstered the economy to steady growth. Additionally, Botswana's position in the region is increasingly strengthened because of its adherence to peace, political stability and unswerving pursuit of democratic policies. Botswana has also put in place an impressive system for managing the national resources, a one stop system for new investors, a disciplined and productive civil service and a manageable volume of debt.

These achievements have earned Botswana a leading position in the subregion and it fits the theme of this year's Botswana's International Trade Fair which is "Botswana: Base for Regional Trade".

Mr. President,

Our Continent has entered a particularly challenging time and this is more so for this region, Southern Africa. I note that you have for this year focussed on Botswana as a base for regional trade. This is appropriate and in keeping with the role your country has and continues to play in this sub-region.

The evaluation of any nation's Trade Fair reflects its economic history and achievements in a broad spectrum of activities. In Botswana's International Trade Fair, we witness an accurate reflection of your country's economic and trade successes. I note with pride how this country moved from complete dependency on agriculture and minerals and diversified into what we are witnessing today. On exhibition in the various pavilions are an array of sophisticated products such as technological, industrial and mining machinery. The level of import substitution that has been achieved in producing some of these products bodes well for a stable and sustainable economic growth which will lead to a better development of technical skills and higher employment.

Botswana, Your Excellency, has by virtue of its central geographical position in the Southern African region played a leading role as a base for regional trade. Given the recent collapse of apartheid and the inauguration of a democratic government in South Africa, the economic and trade relationships with neighbouring countries, has assumed an increased importance in your country. This is made even more relevant when we realize the economic liberalization and democratization processes in other countries of the region. These developments undoubtedly bring opportunities and challenges to the regional and international trading scope.

The reorientation of the Southern African Development Community, does represent a further facilitation of the integration process and is set to provide a very important framework for Botswana's economic growth in the future.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, to meet these challenges, your country has to exploit and develop its competitive advantages and diversify further its economic base. In this connection, let me note that the expansion of world trade has inevitably affected the behaviour of enterprises deeply. The previously safe markets have gone and more competitors are arriving to cut market shares with lower prices and better products.

Enterprises the world over have discovered that it is not good enough to meet the competition, they must surpass it. Let me add that soon, there will be few places in Africa where inefficient producers can hide. To survive in this competitive environment, African firms must be able to adopt quickly, and be willing to take risks and try new methods.

Our manufacturers must realize that currently there is stiff competition for markets and capital and a continuing need for enterprises to change and improve in order to survive.

I am greatly concerned at the ever deteriorating economic situation which most of our countries are facing. The effects of adjustment, the crushing burden of the debt, the collapse of the commodity prices and in some cases our own mismanagement of our economies have rendered our people even poorer in terms of per capita income and quality of life than they were after the first decade of independence. The achievements we had in that decade in health, education, infrastructure and in production capacity have been eroded. The gap is increasingly widening between Africa and the rest of the world. Our continent is now leading the list of least developed by every human development indicator. Yet Africa is rich in every conceivable way, it is rich with land for agriculture, it is rich in mineral resources including energy, it is rich above all with its people and their determined spirit to face all odds and disasters, natural and man-made.

We have a responsibility to ourselves and future generations of Africans to resolve this monumental paradox.

It is not easy. I have a sense of optimism in that most countries are currently engaged in or embarking on the herculean efforts at instituting measures designed to halt economic decline and restore productivity, growth and development. Africa realizes that it must take responsibility for the economic mistakes of the past. However, African governments must opt for clear policies that encourage the process of change. There is no substitute for political will. This takes courage and determination. Stabilization and structural adjustment programmes are painful, managing them requires consummate political skills and cooperative national effort.

The Botswana International Trade Fair 1994 is also taking place at a historical time when the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community has already been ratified by the required number of member states and has in effect entered into force. The Treaty, among other things, is intended to expand intra-African trade as the mainstay of the present African development strategy as embodied in the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and in the Final Act of Lagos (FAL). This Fair will also add momentum to strategies for revitalization, recovery and growth of Africa's trade in 1990s and beyond. Our Ministers of Trade have appealed to African countries to adopt appropriate measures to encourage trade within the framework of the sub-regional institutions. These strategies, aim, among other things, at the diversification of the overall trade of the regions, and contribute to the eventual establishment of the African Economic Community.

It is time now to work together to implement the Abuja Treaty and it is through fairs like this one that we can get our business operators together. I therefore urge and encourage the Government and the organizers of the Fair to make this Fair known to all our countries and to encourage and facilitate their participation.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Botswana International Trade Fair, 1994, is taking place at a very important time when that the Republic of South Africa which is a major trading partner with the Republic of Botswana has joined our ranks. The economic and political landscape in the region has radically changed. It is particularly important to note that the admission of South Africa into the world community and especially as a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) would usher in a new era of cooperation arrangements in Southern Africa. I have already spoken of South Africa's involvement in regional cooperation and integration and its prospects to bring benefits to SADC countries and South Africa itself. The enlarged market with free movement of goods, people, capital and human resources no doubt stands to spur growth and development through the sub-continent. In this connection the current review of South African Customs Union (SACU) should be so designed to enable the Union to be a driving force for the economic integration of Southern Africa. Botswana by its central location, solid infrastructure and stability offers an excellent base for manufacturing and locating business to benefit from the expanded market of SACU, the region and Africa as a whole.

The Theme for this year's Fair Seminar will be **"Buy Botswana"**. This Theme is very close to our heart for the fact that the OAU's 5th All Africa Trade Fair held in Kinshasa in 1988 was **"Buy Africa"**. It is important because we cannot buy from each other unless and until we have enough confidence in our products to buy them ourselves. The Theme **"Buy Botswana"** therefore presents a challenge and an opportunity for the Botswana business community. The challenge is to produce and offer to the consumers quality products, products that meet the taste of the consumer, that will last and that are efficiently produced and sold at competitive prices. The opportunity is to educate the Botswana consumers on the range of products on offer, to teach them to invest in their own future and that of their children. When you buy Botswana you are securing and creating more jobs and investments. It is, therefore, my pleasure to add my voice of support to this campaign of **"Buy Botswana."**

This year, the Botswana International Trade Fair organizers have dedicated one day to be designated as **"Traders' Day"**. The traders' day will provide an opportunity for businessmen and women only to visit the stands, seek information and negotiate deals with the exhibitors. This is a welcome innovation. We have used traders' days during the 6th OAU Trade Fair and found them very productive. I, therefore, urge all businessmen and women present to take full advantage of this opportunity.

To add to the fun and festivities, the organizers of the Fair are mounting a Fashion Show. The Fashion Show will provide the Botswana Garment Producers an opportunity to show the public their products and influence the taste of consumers. Fashion Shows world wide have been the leaders in determining dress trends.

In conclusion I also urge the foreign and regional exhibitors, to use this trade fair as a mechanism for disseminating information to other business communities in their own countries on the abundant business opportunities available in the Republic of Botswana and Africa. More importantly, following your exhibition here, it is my hope that you will take concrete measures to establish business relationships with your counterparts in this country.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish the Botswana International Trade Fair 1994 all success. This Fair should serve as an impetus for the Government of the Republic of Botswana to achieve greater prosperity in the future. For the exhibitors, this Fair provides a unique opportunity to work together with the people of Botswana towards concerted efforts on the successes of Botswana and enable it to achieve its status as the hub of regional development and trade. To all the businessmen and women, I say good shopping and I urge them to capitalize on the opportunities offered. To the Government of Botswana, I say thank you and to the Organizers, I say well done, to the public, I say have fun in the Fair.

I thank you.