



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,  
AT THE OPENING OF THE 73<sup>RD</sup> ORDINARY SESSION OF THE  
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**TRIPOLI, LIBYA**

**24 FEBRUARY 2001**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**Your Excellency Brother Muammar Ghaddafi  
Leader of the Al-Fatah Revolution,**

**Honourable Ministers and other Plenipotentiaries,**

**Distinguished Representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General, ECA, ADB and Chief Executives of the Regional Economic Communities,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At this opening of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of our Continental Organization, I would like to join the Leader of the Great Al-Fatah Revolution, Brother Muammar Ghaddafi, in extending a warm welcome to all Ministers, Heads of Delegation and distinguished guests who have joined us here today. I wish also to thank the people of the Jamahiriya for the warmth of their welcome and for the gracious hospitality extended to us since our arrival. This is the third time we are holding a Council of Ministers meeting in Tripoli in the past four years, an act that clearly demonstrates the commitment of this country to the realization of our continental objectives. I would like in this respect, to salute the Libyan people, particularly Brother Muammar Ghaddafi, for their unflinching support to the noble causes of our Continent and for the Leader's unequivocal commitment to the larger African vision of our Founding Fathers, for the greater unity of our peoples and our Continent.

May I also take this opportunity to thank the outgoing Chairman of Council, Honourable Koffi Panou, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Togo, and his distinguished predecessor in office, Mr. Joseph Kokou Koffigoh for the dedication they have demonstrated in discharging their responsibilities. I look forward to working very closely with the incoming Chairman.

This session is devoted to addressing mainly budgetary and administrative matters. Apart from considering various reports relating to the financial situation of the Organization and also reviewing the progress of the restructuring exercise, Council is expected to deliberate on the proposed budget for the next financial year and to review some political and socio-economic developments in the Continent. Furthermore, in view of the fact that this Session will be followed immediately by the Fifth Extra-Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, Council will also convene in an extended session in Sirte, to prepare for the Extra-Ordinary Summit.

Over the past few years, I have regularly drawn the attention of Council to the unhealthy financial situation of the Organization. Repeatedly, I have expressed serious concern over the fact that this general negative financial trend is threatening to undermine the effective functioning of our Organization. In particular, I have consistently referred to the diminishing levels of annual contributions, with increasingly fewer members meeting their obligations within the designated period. Much of the budgetary allocation is utilized for recurrent expenditures while other major activities undertaken by the General Secretariat are internally financed mostly from arrears. In effect, over the past 10 years, the budget has literally depreciated both in constant and current value. Obviously, this situation is not healthy.

Let there be no doubt that the financing of our Organization is, and must remain our collective responsibility. The realization of our objectives depends entirely on all Member States meeting their financial and other obligations. We all recognize that Member States are passing through a difficult period characterized by the prevalence of complex challenges. Nevertheless, the sustenance of the Continental Organization, which is an embodiment of our cohesion, unity and collective strength, requires that we all live up to our obligations.

It is important to underscore the importance of addressing the financial situation of the Organization because we are now on the verge of establishing the African Union, that will elevate and consolidate continental unity and that will necessitate the creation of several other organs. Obviously, all these institutions will require adequate resources for their functioning. At the same time, we do not want to bequeath to the African Union and its Institutions the negative legacy of resource deprivation right at their foundation. It is important, therefore, for Member States to assume their full responsibility.

I wish also to inform Council that significant progress has been achieved in the restructuring exercise. The entire General Secretariat has now fully entered into a change mode in all the basic organizational components. Some significant steps have been taken in the areas of human resources, institutional structure, systems and methods, as well as on rules and regulations. The main preoccupation at this juncture is to deepen the transformation and orient the change to the desired vision. I wish to convey, once again, my sincere appreciation to all Member States and staff of the General Secretariat for the cooperation that facilitated the attainment of this objective. The various partners that have supported us financially also deserve our gratitude. We all realize that restructuring is a long-term process and not simply a one-act affair. I am confident that we will all remain on course and strive to realize the main objectives of this exercise.



This 73<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session of Council is taking place against the backdrop of a positive evolution in some of the most complex and challenging situations that confronted us as a Continent and which constituted real threats to the cohesion, peace, security and stability of many countries and different regions in the Continent.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a major and historic development in our Continent. It was made possible thanks to the readiness and positive disposition of both parties to whom we pay tribute. It was achieved as a result of the sustained efforts of our Organization and many of our leaders, especially President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. It also represented the convergence of collective and coordinated action with our international partners, to whom we express profound appreciation. The seriousness with which both Ethiopia and Eritrea are implementing that Agreement, despite difficulties here and there, gives us great confidence in the entire process. This confidence is further reinforced by the important and constructive role being played by the United Nations with whom we are working very closely.

Considering the complexity of the crisis and the great success that has been achieved, it is evident that given the cooperation of the parties, the determination and commitment of our Organization and Leaders as well as the cooperation of our partners, it is possible to overcome even some of the most intractable of conflicts.

Another area where the determination and perseverance of our Continental Organization and its member States has brought in rich dividends, is the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros. Here, I am happy to inform Council that after long and strenuous efforts by the OAU, the situation in the Archipelago appears also to be moving in the right direction. Thanks to the efforts of our Continental Organization, with the full support of the International Organization of the Francophonie, the League of Arab States, the European Union and other partners in the international community, an Agreement for the establishment of a new Comorian Ensemble was signed in Fomboni last Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup>.

I wish to express appreciation to my Special Envoy to the Comoros, Mr. Francisco Madeira, the countries of the region coordinated by the Republic of South Africa, the Government of the Comoros, the opposition, the leadership of Anjouan and Moheli and all the other parties, who worked tirelessly to bring about the new dispensation. Needless to point out, that the test of the commitment of the parties to the Agreement they negotiated and signed will be in its full implementation. I trust that they will not be found wanting so that all aspects of the complex and multi-faceted problems in the Archipelago can be addressed comprehensively and as a matter of priority. These

include the ending of separatism, the return to constitutional order, national reconciliation, as well as economic development and reconstruction.

The signing of the Burundi Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Arusha last August and the continuing and determined efforts of Former President Mandela had certainly enhanced the prospects for peace in that country. It is important that all the parties and particularly the armed groups should extend the maximum cooperation to the facilitation efforts so that remaining obstacles are overcome.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, I am encouraged by the recent developments in the peace process. We have closely followed the evolution of the situation since the unfortunate and cowardly assassination of the President of the DRC, Mzee Laurent Desire Kabila. The new Leader of the country, President Joseph Kabila, in concert with the leaders of the region and the parties to the conflict, have injected fresh impetus into the peace process. I am particularly encouraged by the plan for the disengagement and redeployment of forces agreed upon by the parties. Consequently, following the combined efforts of President Chiluba, other Leaders of the region, the OAU and the United Nations, we are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel. The outcome of the Lusaka Summit held earlier this month, as well as the deliberations and conclusions of the joint meeting of the United Nations Security Council and the Political Committee strengthen this optimism.

In Somalia, there has also been a positive evolution of the situation. Today, we have in our midst, representatives of the Transitional Government of Somalia. I extend a warm welcome to them. As we welcome Somalia back into the African fold, we must not lose sight of the fact that great challenges still lie ahead.

Clearly, the task of consolidating the new dispensation in Somalia will not be easy. There is an urgent need to pursue vigorously the challenge of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation in that country. The importance of working for an all-inclusive political process cannot be over-emphasized. Intensifying the dialogue between the Transitional Government and all other parties who, at this point of time, remain outside the process, should be pursued as a matter of priority. The objective must continue to be the attainment of a comprehensive peace and reconciliation within the country. And as efforts are made towards this objective, Somalia, its people and its transitional government and other institutions need to be supported and assisted.

While being encouraged by all these positive developments, we must be conscious of the fact that there are still many unresolved crises and conflict situations in the Continent. These include the conflicts in Angola, Southern Sudan and the situation in Western Sahara, all of



which have been extensively covered in my introductory note to this session of Council. I shall not, therefore, dwell on them. However, the magnitude and dimension of some of these crises deserve our particular attention.

I would like to highlight in this respect the grave concern that I have over the situation in the Republic of Guinea and on a wider scale, the continuing instability in the Mano River Basin Union countries. It is a sad twist of fate and ironical that the Republic of Guinea, a country that has been in the forefront of upholding the African tradition of compassion towards refugees and other victims of natural and man-made humanitarian emergencies, should itself be confronted with destabilization.

I wish to appeal to all concerned to extend support to the ongoing efforts to address the humanitarian tragedy in the Republic of Guinea. But beyond this appeal, I wish, once again, to reiterate our firm support for the efforts of the Current Chairman of ECOWAS and other Leaders of ECOWAS Member States towards a resolution of the crisis in the Mano River Basin Union countries. At the same time, we need to build and strengthen the international consensus and action with respect to the conflict in Sierra Leone.

As we review the many crises facing our Continent, we must be mindful that the most dreadful challenge confronting us is certainly the HIV-AIDS pandemic. The gravity of this pandemic needs no overstating. The new statistics are staggering and heart-rending. Our societies are being affected at all levels and in every sphere. Indeed, this is a serious emergency requiring our collective strength in taking concrete steps to combat it. The recently-held Africa Development Forum organized by the Economic Commission for Africa and in which the OAU actively participated, was an important milestone towards developing a framework for strategic leadership and intervention. I am confident that the forthcoming Special Summit on HIV-AIDS and other related infectious diseases, that will be held in Abuja, Nigeria, in April this year, will provide an opportunity for African leaders at the highest level to reinvigorate the fight against this pandemic.

During this session, Council will also consider the draft Protocol on the Establishment of the Pan-African Parliament. This historic document, as you may recall, is part and parcel of the overall agenda aimed at fostering a higher level of integration which is anchored in the African people. Indeed, the deliberations of this session of Council are solemn and are of historical significance. They are important milestones in our endeavour to create a better destiny for the people of our Continent. I am confident that by being guided by the vision of Sirte, and inspired by the ideals enunciated by our Founding Fathers, this session of Council will live up to the challenge.

In conclusion, let me, on behalf of the OAU, reaffirm our firm support and our solidarity to the Palestinian people and with the leadership of the PLO at this particularly challenging time for them and a difficult period in the Middle East.

I thank you.