



"THE CHALLENGE FOR PEACE-MAKING IN
INTERNAL CONFLICTS IN AFRICA"

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ORGANISED BY INTERNATIONAL ALERT
IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to welcome you all to this conference which is being organized here in Addis Ababa, headquarters of the OAU by International Alert in concert with the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace and Development. The OAU which has had the occasion to participate in similar initiatives undertaken in the past by a number of international NGOs, wishes to signal its unqualified support for this present initiative which falls within one of its own priority areas: conflict prevention, management and resolution. This conference thus furnishes us with a further opportunity to discuss amongst ourselves in Africa and with our international partners, ways and means by which we can sharpen our perception and strengthen our ability to act in this field.

This conference could not have been held at a more opportune time when the phenomenon of conflicts has very much become a topical issue. Only yesterday, we were utterly shocked by the horrifying images of death and hunger and suffering in Somalia resulting from clan and political warfare which had culminated in near complete disintegration and fragmentation of the society. Today, we are numbed by the outcome of intense conflict in Rwanda, excruciatingly painful and undoubtedly shameful; causing death,

physical harm no doubt to hundreds of thousands in the country; but wounding, at one and the same time, the collective spirit and conscience of the rest of Africa and humanity as a whole. Our common Africanness and our common humanity dictates the view that for each child, each person that died of hunger and disease or of the bullet or the machete, our dignity as human beings was diminished. The sight of thousands of decomposing corpses littered everywhere, seemed to capture the very essence of the condition of death and disintegration and total hopelessness.

The challenge of conflicts in Africa no longer seems to be merely that there is a myriad of them and that they continue to mushroom and mushroom relentlessly. As if the situation was not bad enough, Africa is further challenged by the re-emergence of old and dormant conflicts, such as the one that we witnessed in Rwanda, in a more intense and vicious manifestation.

This type of internal conflict, added its presence to the already complex ones which were not merely political or ideological in origin, or ones which emerged purely out of problems arising from the way of democratization in the country. There were conflicts which ensued from deep rooted and emotional causes such as ethnicity and religion; and which, in appearing intractable, perhaps deferred speedy resolution. Further still, the internal conflicts of the new order, such as the one in Rwanda and Burundi, and the earlier one in Liberia, threatened to plunge the whole of the sub-region concerned into a major conflagration.

Notwithstanding this scenario of a continent ravaged in many parts by the spreading cancer of violence, death and destruction, many on the continent have remained determined and resolved to fight back as crusaders of peace. Behind this determination and resolve to vanquish war and fight for peace has been first and foremost the recognition by Africans themselves of this serious need to tackle the problem.

Mr. Chairman,

The struggle for freedom in the continent was a struggle for peace and justice. If therefore our people lacked peace, their freedom was in vain. Nothing illustrates more this irony than the number of refugees in Africa. Twenty five years ago, there were six hundred thousand, now we are speaking of seven million and over fifteen million internally displaced. To these people who have been forced into a life devoid of hope, to the many who have lost their means of livelihood and witnessed the horror of death of their loved ones, independence and political freedom is empty and without meaning. The challenge of peacemaking in internal conflicts is to bring hope to these people, to bring meaning to freedom of the continent. This is why, the agenda of resolving conflicts now assumes fundamental importance.

The challenge of peacemaking in internal conflicts is basically to avoid conflict in the first place. To do so, our

countries need to put in place the kind of policies, and build habits of deeds and of mind, which do not seek to promote conflict. By this I mean policies which are politically inclusive and seek to promote equity and justice in society. All too often, we have witnessed our societies being torn apart by the internal struggle for equal access to opportunity, national resources and for participation in the political processes. Politics of rigidity and of exclusion, have in many parts of our continent created hotbeds of tension as have those of regionalism, tribalism, racial and religious intolerance.

For africa to emerge from this legacy of divisive and conflict-generating politics we must be prepared to build a new political culture - one which promotes harmony and unity - and one which is founded on the principles of equity and justice. Today our continent is going through a period of fundamental change. Politically, we are seeing more and more countries convert to political pluralism and holding multi-party elections. Economically, the entire continent is restructuring and adjusting. All this is with the central objective of instituting the political and economic changes which will sustain our societies in the years ahead. The challenge at hand therefore, is how to manage transition. Politically, we must strive to see that change is effected smoothly and without undermining the many socio-economic and political gains which have been made at great cost. yes, we need to change the way we conduct political business in the

continent. We must ensure greater popular participation in the process of governance. Our leaders must ensure that government is accountable and its operations made transparent. Human rights must be respected and promoted, and so must we advocate greater freedom of expression and of the press as well as the independence of the judiciary. Those are the ingredients of democracy which find universal relevance. But at the same time, we must equally ensure that the process of building democracy is undertaken peacefully and in a manner which takes into due consideration the material conditions of our countries. Likewise, the democracy we want to build must respond to the specific needs of our societies and embody the essence of our traditions, history and culture.

Economically, the restructuring and the adjustments being made are intended to stem the slide of our countries into deeper poverty, to restore productivity and growth. So far, this has entailed great suffering to the people, as fiscal austerity has forced governments to make deep cuts into public spending. Health care, education, housing and other social services, are increasingly getting out of reach of the ordinary citizen. Unless safety nets to shore up the poor are cast, this holds the potential for conflicts. This is why I believe, we need to manage economic transition in the continent, in ways which will balance the needs of productivity and growth and those of human development. The new economic systems we are building must have in-built means which promote equal access to national resources and to opportunity. As

we pursue the objectives of fiscal frugality and economic liberalism, we should not be oblivious to the suffering which these may bring about especially to the poor.

Mr. Chairman,

I speak of economic reform in the context of peace-making because the two are linked. We can not make peace in circumstances of poverty and destitution. The very weight of poverty, undermines peace and stability in any society. This is why, it is imperative for Africa to manage its economic transition carefully, ensuring that peace and stability are not undermined in the process.

Mr. Chairman,

At the level of the OAU, the challenge of peace-making consists of efforts at assisting in the management of transition. We have been associated in observing elections in many of our countries. The objective of our presence has been, at a political level, to express our solidarity with the process of change, and at a practical level, to witness the conduct of elections. I am happy to say that we have found our presence very helpful, both in terms of creating confidence among the political forces in the countries we went to and in fostering greater transparency in the process of elections itself.

Elections as an empowering tool of political decision and choice, are a critical element in our strategy of peace-making in Africa. We therefore need to ensure that elections are prepared and conducted well and in an orderly manner. The electorate needs to be educated, both on the issues and on the mechanics of elections. Voter education is essential, if people are to make informed decisions and not manipulated by crafty politicians taking advantage of the difficult circumstances in our countries or exploiting for temporary gains but with lasting severe repercussion ethnic, tribal or religious sentiments.

Beyond observing elections, it had always been our firm view that by far, the most limiting factor in peace-making in internal conflicts had been the lack of an accepted institutional and political framework in the continent. While of course in the past, Africa dealt with conflicts, they were only those between States.

Sovereignty was a very jealously guarded principle. Newly independent and sovereign States in Africa detested the quasi-legalistic formalism of institutions such as the Commission for Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration. As if by mutual agreement, all avoided the Commission which has continued to exist even till today only on paper. There was a demonstrable preference for Ad-hoc, good offices arrangements whose modus operandi was mainly political. The OAU through the Ad-hoc mechanisms had

acquired considerable experience in political settlement of disputes. The Member States preferred this arrangement because as sovereign States, the arrangement insulated them against possible loss of face, as in most cases, issues were left in abeyance only to resurface in a few years' time.

Mr. Chairman,

Even if we cannot claim complete success in terms of definitive settlement of the disputes, we can, without doubt, claim that Africa's interventions were able to douse the embers of conflicts. None of the conflicts were able to explode to the degree and dimension of what we see today.

In spite of this achievement, we in the OAU were the first to recognize the inadequacies of the process for conflict management. We all recognize the need for change sometimes, but we are also aware that such changes do not come as rapidly as we wish them. It was not until July 1990 that the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in a historic declaration resolved to play an increasing and effective role in conflict resolution, even in internal conflicts which hitherto had been a "no go area" a "taboo" for the OAU. That declaration had prophetic undertones in terms of what were to come later.

The resolve of the Heads of State and Government had to be translated into operational terms. It was obvious the new enthusiasm and determination could not be accommodated within the moribund Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration nor would the Ad hoc method alone be appropriate for the new challenge. The new challenge required first and foremost a preventive aspect, a containment/management/resolution aspect and a modest peace observation aspect that would operate within a political framework. We built on the new initiative and submitted a proposal for the creation of a mechanism within the OAU for conflict prevention, management and resolution. In Cairo last year, the proposal was accepted and the OAU now has a three-tier Central Organ for Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts.

The mechanism reflects the determination of Africa to take the lead in the management of its own conflicts. It has filled a long felt vacuum. It has come into being at a time when Africa is being torn apart and its populations systematically being decimated. The mechanism meets at its Ambassadorial level at least once a month, twice a year at Ministerial level and once a year at Summit level. There are provisions for extra-ordinary sessions at all levels. The significance of this new arrangement is that at least once in a month there is an organ that deliberates on the conflict situation in Africa and stands ready for all emergencies. In institutional terms therefore, the OAU has put its house in order.

But it is one thing setting up institutions and another thing making the institutions function effectively and efficiently. For the OAU, this is the biggest problem and the biggest challenge. The institutions need to be backed up by resources; human, material and financial. Without those resources, especially the financial resources, we will be defeating the objective of setting up the mechanism. We are fully aware of the heavy financial costs involved in peace-making and peace-building ventures. But we believe that the venture must be a partnership between our governments and peoples and between ourselves and the international community. This is why we have set up a Peace Fund to receive voluntary contributions from Africa and from the international community.

It is important to stress the contributions from Africa. Hitherto, all such expenses have been borne by the governments. The Governments are still prepared to play their role but it would not be enough. This is why the people of Africa who are equally concerned by the humiliations that stare them in the face from the images on the televisions, are being called upon to make a contribution. If school children in Europe and America could make a gesture for the starving millions in Africa, I don't see why Africans should be indifferent. We are in the process of formulating a campaign strategy to enable as many Africans, and organizations, as possible to make a contribution.

The magnitude of the challenge facing Africa is such that Africa cannot go it alone. Any one of the conflict situations has demonstrated this. Our efforts have to be complemented by the international community. We believe that in the interest of our common humanity, it is no longer a question of charity, but a responsibility that the international community must help. In any case, we cannot seriously talk of an inter-dependent world if we do not together tackle the ills and tragedies that constitute an affront to our very humanity.

Mr. Chairman,

While the mechanism is focussed primarily on prevention of conflicts, increasingly, it is becoming evident that it will have to assume a peace-keeping role. The experience gathered in Rwanda and now in Burundi indicates clearly that in order to sustain a peace process, one must have both the political and military initiatives. Today, we are making some progress in Burundi because we are able to sustain the duality of political and military action. Likewise are the ECOWAS efforts in Liberia. Apart from this operational need, we have also been rudely awakened to the reality of international priorities. Yes, we need and must insist on a United Nations support. After all, Africa is an important part of the United Nations family. But, as we have seen, in this period of competing needs, the priorities of the United Nations may be elsewhere, and we can therefore not afford to sit and wait.

This new reality has strengthened me in the view that Africa should be able to take action on its own. We have human resources and even with our poverty and immense problems, we can make a modest beginning.

Mr. Chairman,

The OAU is trying to strengthen its present means of dealing with conflicts. Our Governments have began on the right path. While we will try to do our best, we know that we are limited in our resources. We therefore need the solidarity and support of the international community in political and material terms. We will strive to strengthen our links of cooperation with NGOs like Alert, so that we can put our partnership to the service of peace in our countries.

I thank you.