

File

**AFRICA IN CRISIS: OAU'S RESPONSE AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

**BY**

**DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY GENERAL OF  
THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

June 1995

## INTRODUCTION

Thirty-two years ago, in 1963, thirty-one African leaders met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to participate in the signing ceremony of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In establishing the OAU, the founding fathers were conscious of the need to:

- a) promote the Unity and Solidarity of the African States;
- b) co-ordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve better life for the peoples of Africa;
- c) defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence;
- d) eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and
- e) promote international cooperation, having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human rights.

These have remained the major strategic interests guiding African International Relations and multilateral Diplomacy. The elements were a product of a clear perception on the part of the African leaders on the nature and structure of the international system within which Africa, as its new member, was to articulate and defend the aspirations and demands of the region.

In establishing the OAU, the founding fathers were also guided by their own experiences in their respective struggles for decolonization. During this period the African leaders realized the imperative necessity to formulate regional strategies and initiate specific collective measures to strengthen their collective bargaining capacity within the international system.

In this regard, the OAU Member States increasingly felt the need to coordinate and harmonize their general policies, specially in the following fields:

- a) political and diplomatic fields;
- b) economic cooperation, including transport and communication;
- c) education and cultural cooperation;
- d) health, sanitation,<sup>1</sup> and nutritional cooperation;
- e) scientific and technical cooperation; and
- f) cooperation for defence and security.

The ultimate objective for the coordination and harmonization of policies was to provide the fragile African states, emerging from colonial rule and confronted with a hostile international political and economic environment, some degree of sense of collective security through the minimization of individual vulnerability in their relations with the colonial powers. The OAU Charter was, indeed, conceived as a covenant for regional security and mutual survival. The OAU was also envisaged to be a mechanism for promoting economic emancipation through regional integration.

## HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE OAU

### i) The Genesis of the OAU

The OAU, as a regional organization, is a product of an interplay between forces of freedom, justice and human dignity and those of domination, subjugation and exploitation. The signing of the OAU Charter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on May 25, 1963, was a clear manifestation of the victory of the forces of freedom, justice and human dignity and the defeat of the forces of colonialism that had haunted the continent over many decades. The establishment of OAU was also a culmination of many attempts, both inside and outside Africa, aimed at promoting a new awareness to facilitate the intensification of the liberation struggles on the continent.

While there was a common understanding between the Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora on the scope and nature of the liberation struggle, there was no common agreement on the ideology to be used during the struggle and to guide Africa's development after independence. The divergence of views on the continent resulted into the emergency of two rival groups, popularly known as the Casablanca and the Monrovia groups.

The Addis Ababa Charter was therefore, a compromise incorporating the views of both groups. In the end, the African leaders had established a loose regional organization without supranational powers. In any case, they had solemnly affirmed and declared their adherence to the following principles:



- a) the sovereign equality of all Member States;
- b) non-interference in the internal affairs of States;
- c) respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each states for its inalienable right to independent existence;
- d) peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration;
- e) unreserved condemnation, in all its forms, of political assassination as well as of subversive activities on the part of neighbouring states or any other States;
- f) absolute dedication to the total emancipation of the African territories which are still dependent; and
- g) affirmation of a policy of non-alignment with regard to all blocs.

These principles have remained the basic source of African international relations and diplomacy.

#### ii) Major issues in the Colonial Period

The major pre-occupation of the African leaders during the colonial period was absolute dedication to the emancipation of the African territories which were still dependent. Against this background, the founding fathers decided to establish the OAU Coordinating Committee for the

Liberation of Africa based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to coordinate the activities of various liberation movements. To support and strengthen decolonization activities on the continent, the African Leaders also decided to establish a special fund within the Liberation Committee to finance exclusively such activities.

The struggle for the elimination of all kinds of discrimination, especially with regard to the system of apartheid was the corner stone of Africa's decolonization policy. This policy against Apartheid was integrated in the broader struggles for political liberation and economic emancipation of the African Continent. For the leaders of Africa, an end to apartheid meant the emergence of new free, democratic, non-racial and united South Africa. But the end of apartheid also meant the end of distablization of the economies and political systems of the African countries neighbouring South Africa. To this end, a committee on decolonization and a committee on apartheid were both established at the United Nations for purposes of organizing the necessary diplomatic support and channel financial and logistic aid to Liberation Movement with a view to accelerating the decolonization process and the elimination of apartheid.

### iii) The Post-Colonial Agenda

The 1970s were almost the final years of the Liberation struggles on the continent. The process of decolonization which had gained momentum in the 1960s, had by the 1970s recorded phenomenal progress. Indeed, between 1960 and 1970, thirty-two countries had become independent. Africa, which at signing of the United Nations Charter in 1946 had only three independent countries: Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa, moved into 1970s with over 41 independent states.

The post-independent agenda of the African countries was, essentially to consolidate national sovereignty and defend territorial integrity and independence. The newly emerging nations of Africa had to cope with the exigencies of nation building. The new leaders and their governments had to evolve out of their inherited colonial situation, a national political system within which problems related to the national question could be addressed. Therefore, the major preoccupation of the new nations of Africa was to embark on structural transformation of the colonial economies into national economies. The objective was to be able to meet the basic needs of the new states. In this regard, the focus was on the establishment of institution of governance through the promotion of human resource development, quality of life and habitat as well as economic growth and employment.

Moreover, the post-colonial agenda focused on the eradicating poverty in all its manifestations. Illiteracy, ignorance and disease, were to be eliminated and a policy of collective and individual self-reliance was to be promoted. In addition, the elimination of apartheid, the consolidation of the institutions of governance, economic recovery and development, inter-states conflict prevention, management and resolution also constituted the major elements of the post-independent agenda.

#### **MAJOR POLICY ISSUES IN THE 1970s and 1990s**

##### **i) Socio-Economic Development and Transformation**

The social and economic situation in Africa has been an issue of great concern to the leaders of the continent since the early 1970s. But, despite the efforts deployed at all levels, there is evidence to suggest that the number of



people living in absolute poverty has increased and not diminished. There are now more people underfed and suffering from malnutrition with limited access to the basic human needs. Indeed, by the late 1970s it had already become clear that the post-colonial economic policies adopted in the 1960s were inappropriate for the economic development and structural transformation of the continent. Conspicuously, such policies had not yield the expected "trickle-down" effects on Africa's socio-economic development and transformation.

The inability of the African countries to initiate growth through appropriate and viable policy options and bring about social and economic transformation is a function of both external and internal factors. On the external side, the collapse in international prices of primary commodities and the world economic recession have all contributed to the inability of the African countries to effect structural transformation. In addition, the decline or, at best stagnation in resource flows, the volatility and fluctuation of exchange currencies as well as mounting debt service obligations and worsening balance of payment deficits, have also contributed to the poor socio-economic performance of the African region. On the internal side, there are problems related to governance, management, culture and civil strife.

It was in light of these socio-economic and political problems facing the continent and the failure of the some of the policy options of the 1960s that African leaders begun to focus on major policy issues to march Africa into the 20th Century. Some of the major policy initiatives are discussed below.

a) *The Special Sessions of the UN General Assembly on Africa*

Since 1960s, the United Nations General Assembly has launched three international development strategies for the socio-economic development and transformation of the African region. Each of the strategies covered a period of ten-years. The first decade was from the 1960s to the 1970s while the second was from 1970s to the 1980s and the last was from 1980s to the 1990s.

During the early 1960s, when the majority of African States were gaining independence, there was great optimism that the continent could effectively mobilize its vast resources to meet the needs and aspiration of its people. This hope was further bolstered by the fact that Africa constituting about one-third of the world total number of States could use the Special Session of the General Assembly to champion the cause of Africa. However, by the mid-1980s, this optimism had given way to disillusionment as Africa became increasingly marginalized in global politics, as a result of tumbling economic fortunes.

But, since the 1970s, Africa has made deliberate efforts through the UN to respond to problems facing the continent. The first of such attempt was the demand for a change in the structure of the international system. This was the major preoccupation of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly. For Africa, the system was undemocratic and it had to go through a process of democratization. The question today is whether or not the system has been democratized. But, the more fundamental questions are: What has been the nature and scope of Africa's response to the structural rigidities of the international system? Why have the strategies and plans designed to address simultaneously



the systemic problems of the Old Order and the restructuring of the global economy failed to yield the expected results. What efforts have been deployed by the African countries, individually and collectively, to implement the various policies and Declaration made at the level of the United Nations? What has been the response of the International Community? These, indeed, are central issues in the analysis of the major policy declarations for Africa in the 1970s - 1990s.

b) *The African Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Independence (1973)*

In 1973, at the beginning of the second United Nations Decade, the Tenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence. The Declaration provided elements of strategy for the development of Africa in the 1970s and outlined the basic principles and objectives of Africa's development and Africa's stand with respect to international economic relations.

In order to give a broader meaning to the Declaration, in July 1977, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the revised framework of Principles for the Implementation of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) in Africa. The demand for the new order was, essentially initiated by Africa with the support of the group of the non-aligned countries otherwise also referred to as the G77. It was a product of the debates of the 1970s which were linked to the preparation of UNCTAD V as well as the preparatory work for the international development strategy for the Third United Nations Decade. The failure to achieve the objectives

of the new International Economic Order, led Africa to begun to think of more innovative inward looking strategies for development and transformation. It was against this background that the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, as well as other major African policy options were elaborated.

c) *The Kinshasa Declaration on the Principle of the Establishment of an African Economic Community*

The Kinshasa Declaration was adopted by an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers, held in Kinshasa, Zaire, in December 1976. It was during this session that the Council agreed on the principles of the establishment of the African Economic Community, defined its objective, strategy and the progressive stages of accomplishing it within 10 to 25 years.

The Kinshasa Declaration provided the basis for the formulation of the Monrovia Strategy and subsequently the Lagos Plan of Action. It was the source and inspiration of other two major development policies, namely, the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD). The African leaders meeting in Kinshasa, Zaire, invited the Secretary General of the OAU in collaboration with the Executive Secretary of the ECA to convene a colloquium of prominent Africans, involved in development issues and policies, science and research, to discuss the development prospects of Africa under two main themes namely, (a) what type of development should Africa aspire to for the year 2000? and (b) what ways and means should be adopted for the purpose?

d) *The Monrovia Strategy*

The Monrovia Strategy for the economic development of Africa was adopted by the Sixteenth Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Monrovia, in July 1979. During the Session, the Assembly having reflected more on the earlier strategies decided to reaffirm the principle of the establishment of an African economic Community and specified modalities and practical programmes for its realization.

The Monrovia strategy drew inspiration from the African Declaration on Cooperation, Development, and Independence, adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and government held in Addis Ababa, in 1973. The Declaration also provided the orientation for Africa's international economic relations. In establishing the Monrovia strategy, the African leader were re-committing themselves to principle of self-reliance, sustainability of economic growth through regional cooperation and integration.

e) *The Lagos Plan of Action*

The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) was adopted by the second extra-ordinary Summit of the OAU in April 1980. The major objective of the Lagos Plan of action was to translate into action those basic principles of the Monrovia Commitment. The Lagos Plan of Action identified Africa's development objectives, the strategies to be followed in order to achieve those objectives and the policy measures to implement the strategies.



The Plan made a number of recommendations regarding food and agriculture, industry, transport and communication, human and natural resources, science and technology as well as regional integration with the basic objective of attaining self reliance and self sustainment in those areas. The LPA established as first objective the alleviation of mass poverty and improvement in the standard of living of the African peoples. Secondly, the concept of self-sustained development is regarded by the Lagos Plan of Action as an important element in Africa's development strategy. Thirdly the issue of collective self reliance was considered as a strategic objective for economic development and transformation.

Three main themes were incorporated in the Plan. The first was Human-centred development through alleviating poverty and raising the welfare of the African peoples. The second theme was establishing a self sustaining process of economic growth and development while the third theme was integrating the African economies for purposes of attaining national and regional collective self reliance in Africa. Unfortunately, with intensification of the economic crisis in Africa in the early 1980s, the approach of the LPA was in many cases abandoned as the main preoccupation of most African policy makers increasingly became crisis management for economic survival. The focus thus shifted to short-term concerns resulting mainly from external shocks such as the collapse of the regime of stable exchange rates, and commodity markets, high interest rates, persistent drought and mounting external debt obligations. Moreover, conflicts, as well as problems of refugees and displaced persons took a centre stage.

f) *Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery*  
(APPER)

The sharp deterioration in the socio-economic situation made African government to formulate in April 1985, proposals on economic recovery and accelerated implementation of LPA. Five years had elapsed since Lagos and no progress had been made in the area of African economic recovery and development.

In July 1985, following a review of the implementation of the Lagon Plan, the Twenty-first Session of the Assembly adopted the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990 (APPER). The main thrust of APPER was to map out a strategy for accelerating the implementation of the Lagon Plan of Action.

APPER was formulated as a concrete programme for reconstruction and rehabilitation, and as a basis for medium and long term structural transformation of the African economies towards self-reliant and self sustaining growth and development. It was based on the LPA and designed to provide the foundation for the achievement of the objectives, of the LPA, concentrating on a set of priority activities and policies to be implemented during the 1986-1990. Food and agriculture was central to APPER.

Agricultural transformation was seen as necessary means for structural transformation. APPER advocated a strong linkages between agriculture, industry and economic infrastructure. Moreover, APPER singled out combating drought and desertification and the development of human resources as priority issues. While committing themselves to the implementation of the measures contained in APPER, the African leaders, were also aware of the limitations imposed by an



unfavorable international economic environment and of the need of the international community to be full involved in the African economic crisis. Thus, in their resolution on the Africa's Economic Situation accompanying APPER, the Assembly requested that another special session of the UN General Assembly be convened on the critical economic situation in Africa.

g) *The UN Programme of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD)*

The thirteenth session of the General Assembly became a special session of the UN General Assembly on Africa's economic and social crisis. APPER constituted the major part of the Africa's submission to the Special Session.

The African submission analyzed the nature of the African crisis, the potential for future development and the actions required both from the African governments and the international community to achieve recovery and development. The African submission was ultimately transformed to become the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD) and was subsequently adopted by consensus by the thirteenth Special Session.

UNPAAERD called on the international community to undertake complementary action to support Africa's recovery and development in two areas: improvement in the external economic environment and improvement in the level, quality and coordination of Aid. By the beginning of the 1990s the commitments made by the international community in support of Africa had not been realized. While the programme did provide a unique framework for new partnership and cooperation it ended up being a total failure, essentially because the

international community was not ready to undertake, the various actions and honour the various commitments embodied in UNPAAERD.

*h) The Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community*

In June 1991, the African leaders signed in Abuja, Nigeria, the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. Since then, over two-thirds of the OAU Member States have already deposited instruments of ratification to the OAU Secretariat.

The Treaty draws its inspiration from the OAU Charter and in this regard, the treaty like the Charter, recognizes the equality and interdependence of member states and calls for greater solidarity and collective self reliance. Moreover, promotion of harmonious development of economic activities among member states and accountability, economic justices and popular participation in development constitute some of the principles of the treaty.

Among the objectives of the community established under the treaty is to promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of African economies in order to increase economic self-reliance and promote an endogenous and self-sustained development. The treaty is conceived as a viable framework for the development, mobilization and utilization of the human and material resources of Africa in order to achieve a self-reliant development. Moreover, the treaty is also conceived as an instrument to promote cooperation in order to raise the standard of living of the African peoples, and maintain and enhance economic stability, foster close and peaceful relations among member states and contribute to the progress, development and economic

integration of the continent. The Treaty provides that the community is to be established gradually in six (6) stages of variable duration over a transitional period not exceeding thirty-four (34) years. The Treaty recognizes the regional economic communities as the pillars of the African Economic Community.

The Treaty is, therefore, a culmination and consolidation of all the policy issues on Africa's socio-economic development and transformation initiated by Africa between 1970 and 1990. What is now required is a clear strategy to translate the aspirations of the treaty into concrete action programmes and to design follow-up strategy to monitor the implementation of the treaty by individual member states, regional economic groupings and other sub-regional organizations. It was against this background and within this framework of understanding that a decision was taken to convene in Cairo in March 1995 the Extra-ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Minister to discuss new and innovative strategies for addressing the socio-economic situation facing the continent.

i) **THE CAIRO AGENDA**

The Cairo Agenda for Action was adopted by the seventeenth Extra-ordinary Session of the Council held in Cairo, Republic of Egypt in March 1995. Immediately after the treaty establishing the African economic Community entered into force, it was decided to convene another extra-ordinary session of the OAU Council of Ministers in Cairo to discuss modalities and measures to alleviate Africa's poor performance in socio-economic development.



The basic premise of the Cairo Agenda was that Africa had the primary responsibility of solving its own socio-economic problems. In other words, the support of the international community can only complement and cannot supplement the efforts of the African peoples and their governments.

The main purpose of the special session was to provide another opportunity for Africa to undertake an in-depth and critical review of the political, economic and social situation in Africa. While recognizing the validity of the many plans, strategies and programmes adopted by Africa at the national, regional and continental levels for the development of the African countries individually and collectively, however, the Council was of the view that these plans, strategies and programmes were not adequately implemented by the majority of the countries and in some cases were completely paralysed and jeopardized by increasing civil strife and natural calamities.

The Cairo Agenda for Action recognized the fact that democracy, good governance, peace security and stability and justice are among the most essential factors in Africa's socio-economic development. Indeed, without democracy and peace development is not possible and, without development, peace is not durable. In this regard, the Cairo Agenda calls upon Member States to give maximum political and financial support to the OAU mechanism for Conflict prevention, management and resolution, for the effective peace making operations, by involving the segments of the population and mobilizing adequate official and private resources for the OAU peace fund.

Like the previous plans, the Cairo agenda recognizes the fact that food and agriculture output has declined substantially since the 1990s. Consequently, most of the African countries have become net food importers. To this end, the Cairo Agenda gives priority to food security. In addition the Agenda also gives priority to capacity building and human resource development. Furthermore, priority is also given to structural transformation of the African economies including industrialization, mineral resources and energy, transport and communication, Trade and Environment. Other areas which have been given priority include effective mobilization and efficient utilization of resources and regional economic integration. The Cairo Agenda provides for a mechanism for follow-up of the implementation process.

#### ii) THE POLITICAL FRONT

The political situation in Africa today is bedeviled by various conflicts and other political upheavals. The energies of the people have been weakened by the political situation prevailing on the continent and are now focused more on survival based on short-term solutions. This trend has negatively impacted on the efforts towards socio-economic transformation and development. Ethnic centred intra-state conflicts are still a commonplace and today Africa holds the unenviable record of hosting no less than 5 million refugees. Moreover, Africa has over 12 million displaced people. In addition, Africa has also been criticized for human rights violation, lack of democracy and democratic institutions. But, over the years, Africa has made commendable strides in the democratization process and more is being done to ensure the protection of human rights, promotion of justice and equality and to address conflict situations on the continent.



Three major policy documents stand out to reflect Africa's efforts in dealing with these issues. The first is the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development. These have provided a broad framework for the major policy options on the political front. The second is the Declaration on the Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World. This declaration was adopted by the Assembly during its Twenty-sixth Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July 1990. The third is the Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Establishment, within the OAU, of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

a) African Charter for Popular Participation in Development

The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development (ACPPD) was adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 1989. The Africa Charter recognized the imperative need to initiate a shift in the decision-making process from top-down to bottom-up approach. Indeed, the logic for change was based on the assumption that if all past plans, strategies and programmes had recognized the imperatives of a bottom-up approach to Africa's economic transformation and development, some of the past-plans would have received a sharper focus and would have had a better chance to be adequately implemented by the individual countries.

Apparently, past-plans had not taken into consideration the need to involve the people in development planning. To this end, the Charter provides a series of measures to be taken by all sections of the society to enhance popular participation in development. The governments are called upon to establish new partnership with all the sections

of the society to ensure that the people participated fully in planning for their future and the future of the continent. The people were placed at the centre of development and development was given a human face.

b) *The Declaration on the Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World*

In July 1990, the Twenty-sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government undertook a critical review of the political, social and economic situation of the continent, in the light of the rapid changes that were taking place in the world and their impact on Africa. The review was based on a report presented by the OAU Secretary-General entitled: Report of the Secretary General on the Fundamental changes taking place in the World and their implication for Africa: Proposals for an African Response. Subsequently, the Assembly adopted a Special Declaration based on the report of the Secretary General.

The Declaration focused on various issues of concern to Africa at all levels. While it acknowledged and recognized Africa's formidable achievements in the Political field, it also points out the noticeable inability of the African states to address issues of conflict resolution, refugees problems and the growing number of displaced persons in Africa. Regarding the issue of refugees and displaced persons in Africa, there is a general acceptance that the African countries have made commendable efforts in welcoming and assisting refugees but the contribution of the international community has not been commensurate with the needs involved and the magnitude of the problem. To this end, there was a

dire need for Africa to find a long term and global solution and to put an end to the problem of refugees and displaced persons.

Against this background the Declaration recommended that Africa's strategy, to respond to the challenges imposed by the fundamental changes, should be based within the framework of a political and an economic agenda. The political agenda should centre on conflict resolution. In this regard, Member States were required to re-commit themselves to the principles of the OAU. Significantly, while the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States remains valid, it was, however, emphasized that the principle should not be construed to mean or to justify indifference on the part of Member States in a situation of internal conflicts. The Economic Agenda called for National reforms involving all sectors and re-affirms the validity of the past plans, strategies and programmes. The Declaration is increasingly becoming the corner-stone of a new political thinking and orientation within the OAU and among its Member States.

c) *The Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*

The twenty-ninth Ordinary Session of the Assembly held in Cairo in June 1973 decided to establish, within the OAU, a Mechanism for Conflict prevention, management and Resolution. This was a concrete step towards the implementation of the objectives of the 1990 Declaration. In adopting the declaration the African leaders were re-affirming their commitment to work together towards the peaceful and speed resolution of all conflicts. It was also a realization



by the African leaders that one of the most serious impediments to Africa's development was the scourge of conflict.

Before the adoption of the Mechanism, Africa had experimented with several other modalities for conflict resolution in Africa. It is to be recalled that the OAU charter for example, provided for the establishment of Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration. This was the sole organ of the OAU specifically and exclusively charged with conflict resolution. But, for various reasons the commission has remained virtually dormant since its establishment.

To this end, conflicts in Africa were prevented, managed or resolved on an ad hoc basis, through diplomatic means. The use of Ad hoc committees became prevalent in the 60s and 70s. Moreover, the use of Elder States men was also common during the same period. In all these efforts, the significant role of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in conflict resolution was recognized.

In establishing the Mechanism the African leaders saw the opportunity to bring to the process of dealing with conflicts on the continent a new institutional dynamism, enabling speed action to prevent or manage and ultimately resolve conflicts when and where they occur. In this regard, the mechanism has as a primary objective, the anticipation and prevention of Conflicts. In circumstances where conflicts have occurred, the mechanism has the responsibility of undertaking peacemaking and peace building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of these conflicts.

The Mechanism is built around a central organ with the Secretary General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. The Central Organ of the mechanism is composed of the state members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government plus the countries of the out-going Chairman and the in-coming Chairman bearing in mind the principle of equitable regional representation and rotation.

The Central Organ functions at the level of Heads of State as well as that of Ministers and Ambassadors accredited to the OAU or duly authorized representative. It may, where necessary, seek the participation of other OAU member states in its deliberation, particularly the neighbouring countries. The OAU is also cooperate and work closely with the United Nations and African Regional Organizations. A special fund has been established for the purpose of providing financial resources to support exclusively the OAU operational activities relating to conflict management and resolution. The fund is made up of financial appropriation from the regular budget of the OAU, as well as voluntary contribution from Member States and from other sources within Africa. Financial contribution from sources outside Africa may also be accepted. So far, a number of non-African countries have made contribution to support activities related to the mechanism.

The Mechanism has been functioning for the last two years. The OAU is now in the process of strengthening its capacity to respond more effectively to the objectives set out in the Mechanism.

#### THE STATE OF AFRICA TODAY

Africa is going through multiple crisis of economic and political nature. The socio-economic situation on the continent has been declining over the years and the living



conditions of the population has been deteriorating since the 1960s and has accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s. Almost all the plans and strategies designed to arrest the current situation on the continent have not yield any meaningful results. The debt crisis has continued to impact on the efforts of the African peoples while the rate of industrialization has remained low. The level of transport and Communication on the continent reflects the low level of science and technology in Africa. Efforts towards human resource development are considerably low and the situation has been aggravated by brain-drain from the continent.

No substantial progress has been made towards the improvement of health and nutrition in Africa and millions of people are still without access to water. Programmes for the improvement of food security have also not yield meaningful results and Africa has remained, by and large, a net food importer. Significantly, African population is increasing at a high rate particularly in the urban areas where the infrastructure cannot easily absorb the influx of rural urban migration. In short the socio-economic situation on the continent is gradually moving into desperate low and it will require the collective efforts of the African people to move Africa from this socio-economic and political situation.

In addition the international environment has remained hostile to Africa and the external constraints to development are now more prevalent than some years before. The decline or in some cases the stagnation in commodity prices has had serious impact on the efforts of the African peoples towards socio-economic transformation and development. For many years now Africa has called for an international conference on external debt but Africa's development partners have continued to oppose Africa's demand for an international conference on Africa's indebtedness.

Political instability, which has so much affected economic performance of the region has been on the increase in the 1990s. Civil wars have intensified in many parts of Africa giving cause for concern not only in Africa, but also on the part of the international community. In Angola, the conflict has negatively impacted on the development process while the conflict in Rwanda has escalated to a horrible genocidal war for which neither Africa nor the international community was adequately prepared. The situation in Liberia shows no improvement despite several initiative by the leaders of the region with the support of the OAU and the United Nations.

The situation is the same in Burundi where ethnic tension has brought the economy of the country to a standstill. In Somalia clannish wars have continued to paralyze the economic activities in the country and prospects for recovery cannot be contemplated as of now. There is no doubt that the conflict situation on the continent has served to reinforce the notion that Africa is a continent in crisis, surviving on charity and hand outs from the developed countries.

What are the root causes of economic stagnation in Africa? Why has economic regression in Africa lasted for so long without real recovery or accelerated upturn? Is it sufficient or necessary to continue to explain the poor performance of the African economies in terms of political instability, ethnic conflict, the unfavorable international economic environment or in terms of the vagaries of weather. Worse still, is it necessary and sufficient to continue to attribute or blame colonialism for the current socio-economic situation in Africa? These are fundamental questions which

require answers as we contemplate on the future of Africa. The questions also constitute the dimension of the future challenges of the OAU.

#### THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE OAU

Despite all the problems of the Continent, there is no doubt that the OAU has made considerable achievements over the last three decades in many fields. Positive results have been achieved in the field of decolonization and in articulating as well as defending the interests of Africa in the global arena. Notwithstanding these impressive achievements, Africa is still confronted with a series of problems for which solutions must be found. The future challenge of the OAU is to be able to design specific strategies to address these issues and to bring into focus past mistakes and project future prospects for the Continent.

While overall, the OAU continues to enjoy the confidence of its Member States, especially for its ability to project and promote Africa's interests in the world, there is lack of continued support by some Member States to the activities of the Organization. This is demonstrated by the amount of outstanding arrears of contribution with respect to the regular budget of the Organization. This seemingly lack of interest in the Organization is also reflected by the erratic, sometimes lack of participation in OAU meetings. This is also linked to the lack of adequate follow-up in the implementation of the OAU decisions. The fundamental question therefore is how to make OAU more relevant and responsive to the real problems facing the Continent and how to sustain the interest, commitment and support of the Member States.



i) Conflict Resolution

The Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution is a new innovation for Africa in their efforts to address the increasing number of conflicts on the continent. But, this innovation in conflict resolution requires the political will of OAU Member States so that it is able to respond more efficiently to situations of conflict on the continent.

There are three basic elements that must be brought into play to ensure effective utilization of the mechanism for the desired objective and prompt results. The first element has to do with available resources both financial and human, within the General Secretariat. The lack of resources to allow for a more serious involvement by the Secretariat limits the capacity of the mechanism in terms of its functioning as a viable instrument for conflict resolution. With the requisite resources it is possible to establish a network for the collection of information and data to enhance the preventive capacity of the mechanism. The OAU will have to ensure that the requisite resources are available both from official and private sources to enable the mechanism to meet its objectives. There is evidence to suggest that the establishment of the mechanism has generated wide interests within and outside the continent. The challenge now is to maintain the momentum and cultivate further, the spirit of cooperation demonstrated by Africa and the international community for the success of the mechanism.

The second aspect relates to human resource and the capacity of the Secretariat to respond rapidly and efficiently in situations of conflict. At the moment the Department concerned would require more efficient staff with the necessary knowledge and skill to discharge their respective

responsibilities to meet the challenges presented by the mechanism. Human resource development is essential in enhancing the capacity of the mechanism to respond more effectively to the challenges ahead.

The third element relates to the ability of the Secretariat to bring the mechanism closer to the people and parties involved in conflicts. It may not be useful for the mechanism to remain on paper without being effectively used by those who need it. The African peoples must be familiar with the working of the mechanism. There is therefore an imperative need for public awareness and sensitization campaigns to make the mechanism known to the people of Africa. The challenge of the OAU in this area is predicated on the effective and efficient utilization of resources both human and financial for the maximum results intended. But, it is important that parties in conflict have confidence in the mechanism and what it can do to Africa.

ii) Promoting Economic Integration

There is no doubt that the socio-economic situation in Africa has been an issue of great concern to the leaders of the continent and their development partners. A number of plans, strategies and programmes have been initiated over the last three decades to address the problems confronting the continent. To date, there are no noticeable achievements that can be associated with the plans, strategies or programmes. The African continent is still in crisis and it is not possible to speculate as to when Africa will get out of this pathetic situation.

and integration.

There are however, important aspects that must be addressed to ensure that the provisions of the Abuja Treaty are implemented within the Africa region at all levels. The Treaty must be popularized so that the African peoples are made to accept the Treaty as their instrument to promote contacts with their brothers and sisters within the continent. This means that the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty must involve the people. A top-down approach relegates the people to the periphery and takes away the Treaty from the people. A new approach that will allow the people to be fully involved in the implementation activities may prove useful in any attempt to promote regional economic cooperation and integration. It follows therefore, a public awareness campaign would be necessary in order to familiarize the people with the specific provisions of the Treaty and what is required of them in the implementation process. This is a major challenge that the OAU will have to undertake in the years ahead.

iii) Bringing OAU closer to the People

Since its establishment in 1963, the OAU was perceived as largely a political institution dealing mostly with African governments representatives. There is reason to believe that the Organization has remained, to some extent, an institution at the service of governments. It would seem that even the African elite has had little contact with the Organization. Few of the African Universities or Higher Institutions of Learning have a specific curriculum on the OAU. The Organization is treated in the academic circles just like any other international organizations and its relevance to Africa or even its vital role to the development of this continent is little known among University students and their



OAU. The Organization is treated in the academic circles just like any other international organizations and its relevance to Africa or even its vital role to the development of this continent is little known among University students and their lecturers. Yet, African Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning must be at the forefront in promoting the objectives of the OAU.

Yet, the OAU enjoys a great prestige and has an impressive record as an Organization which has championed the cause of Africa's freedom, defended the Continent's dignity and forged links of solidarity between its peoples.

The challenge ahead is for the OAU to initiate a sensitization campaign to make the African peoples more informed about their Organization, and appreciate its relevance to their socio-economic development efforts. In years to come, the OAU will have to work on a strategy to encourage the establishment of OAU Associations in each of the OAU Member States. Radio programmes and other multi-media campaigns would be useful in this regard. An exchange programme involving African Universities and the OAU might be useful. The OAU might also consider the establishment of endowment for Research to encourage research by Africans on the problems confronting the continent. Inter-country cultural activities and exchanges with the OAU as the focal point would greatly promote the image of the Organization and make it more known to the people. The challenge therefore, is to take the OAU closer to the millions of the people in Africa.

iv) New Modalities of Doing Things

There is no doubt Africa today is the most economically backward region in the world. But Africa has plenty of resources with great potentials for economic development and transformation. Many plans, strategies and programmes have been formulated at regional and international levels for purpose of providing the necessary condition and momentum to extricate the continent from this state of affairs, but such plans, strategies or programmes have not yielded the expected results.

The developmental problems enumerated else where in this paper are not unique to Africa. Like Africa, most countries in South-East Asia were also conquered and colonized. Many countries of South-East Asia were poorer than many African countries thirty years ago. Yet, they have been able to extricate their economies from poverty and under development.

Fluctuations in the prices of commodities have almost the same impact to the other countries of the South. But some countries in the South have managed to substantially minimize the impact of the declining commodities prices on their economies. Today, the countries of the South East Asia are less vulnerable to external shocks than the African continent. What Africa needs is to establish new modalities of doing things.

To most Africans, time is always the greatest healer. The idea is that no condition is permanent and therefore over a period of time the condition facing Africa will have to change. So, if Africa is backward today, with

time the continent will advance and complete the transition from backwardness to modernity. This attitude ought to change and we need to be more serious in the way we do things.

African leaders have often demonstrated high quality of commitment to the development of the African peoples. But, in some cases there is lack of accountability, particularly with respect to how we do things and how we make decisions. If development is for the people then the people should be involved in making decisions that affect their development. Popular participation is therefore key to the development process and should be taken seriously in Africa. This also relates to the promotion of better institutions of governance to accelerate the democratization process on the continent and guarantee popular participation in decision-making.

We should be able to follow-up on our action programmes to ensure the intended results have been realized. We also need to restore confidence in our institutions and expertise. There is a tendency to relegate our institutions and our experts on the background on critical national issues. This has to change to allow for the evolution of a new modality of doing things.

v) Mastering the New International Divide

The recent dramatic transformations and developments, particularly in the political, economic, scientific and technological fields have brought about profound changes in the international system. While, the old system was dominated by the politics of balance of power, characteristic of the cold war era, the new order is dominated by the proliferation of economic blocs. It is no longer capitalism versus socialism but rather competition at the market place. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the



Eastern bloc has removed the ideological divide that existed between East and West. Communism is no longer a threat to the West and the countries of eastern Europe are gradually converting to market economies. The concept of a common European home is increasingly becoming a reality. Africa must be able to master the new ideological divide in the international system. The basic question is how can Africa derive maximum advantage from the emerging new international economic order?

vi) Promoting African Solidarity

In the 1960s the level of African solidarity provided the necessary momentum in the struggles for the decolonization on the Continent. Africa was able to speak with one voice in all international fora. It was this sense of togetherness that enabled Africa to forge forward in the promotion and defense of African interests. Today, that solidarity is being tested under the severe economic conditions facing the Continent. African solidarity is as important today as it was during the decolonization period.

Africa needs to design new strategies for the promotion of African solidarity. There is no way Africa can effectively address the issues of conflict prevention, management and resolution or the promotion of economic integration without a high degree of solidarity between and among the African peoples. This is particularly important given the nature of the emerging new international economic order and the new ideological divide.

vii) OAU and the People: Need for a New Partnership

The OAU cannot afford to continue to function as a bureaucratic institution. The Organization has to adapt to with the changing situations, particularly as Africa moves from Political Liberation to socio-economic emancipation. There is need for the OAU to get closer to the people and work with the people. The OAU should put the people at the centre of its efforts. Indeed, the OAU should belong to the people but the people should be encouraged to continue to discharge their responsibilities to the OAU.

This, indeed, is the essence of the new partnership involving the OAU, both its Member States and at the Secretariat and the people. This partnership is important in promoting the aspirations of the OAU and in defending the interests of the African peoples.

CONCLUSION

A series of questions have been raised in this paper but not all of them have been answered. However, the idea was not to provide answers to all the questions per se. Rather, the idea was to stimulate a debate about the future challenges of the OAU. Hopefully, such a debate will involve the African elite, especially from Universities and higher institutions of learning as well as government officials and local communities on how to bring the OAU closer to the people and make the OAU more relevant to the aspirations and demands of the African peoples. But, even more critical is the debate on why have the previous development plans, strategies and programmes failed to move Africa from the state of underdevelopment to a state of development and modernization. Consequently, the

envisaged debates must also focus, essentially on what went wrong with Africa and how can Africa get out of this situation?

Africa is recognized as the continent of the origin of the early-man and our continent is also recognized as the centre of ancient civilization and knowledge. It is not in dispute that some of the institutions of governance in Africa are older than those of Europe and America.

Africa is endowed with enormous resource but such resources have not been effectively utilized for the economic development of the continent.

The challenge is how the Continent can bring all its resources both human and material to interfere and converge into a long term programme for development.

This will require undivided solidarity and determination on the part of African Government and peoples. Africa must close its ranks and work in a collective manner in order to achieve Africa's demand and aspirations in the external world. The OAU is the only regional organization that can galvanize the efforts of the African peoples towards regional collective-good. There is, therefore, an imperative need to place it at the centre of Africa's efforts.