



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE ADOPTION OF THE AFRICAN COMMON POSITION
DURING THE PAN-AFRICAN FORUM
ON THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN**

CAIRO, EGYPT

30 MAY 2001

Your Excellency Madam Susan Mubarak, First Lady of the Arab Republic of Egypt and Chairperson of the Forum,

Your Excellencies African First Ladies Present,

Honourable Ministers,

Representatives of the United Nations Agencies,

Representatives of Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations,

**Representatives of the Children and Youth,
Distinguished Guests,**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like, once again, to thank the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for hosting us over the last few days and extend special thanks to the First Lady of Egypt, Madam Suzanne Mubarak, for her personal commitment to the issue of the rights and welfare of children, which continues to be a vital contribution to our collective progress towards realizing the rights of the child in Africa.

Let me extend my thanks to the other First Ladies of Africa who have graced this Forum with their presence and their contributions, especially on the question of children affected by armed conflict. The active involvement of Africa's First Ladies in such urgent and pressing issues is a welcome development, and we are confident that their initiative in this area is a prelude to the issue being taken with the necessary seriousness at the highest political levels in our Member States and at international level.

I would also like to thank UNICEF for its extensive assistance in making this important exercise possible.

This Forum has been as consultative and inclusive as we have been able to make it. In the past three days, we have had discussions, debates, exchanges of views from all stakeholders, governments, civil society, international organizations and, most of all, children and youth themselves. I would like to emphasize the last point, the involvement of youth. As was clearly demonstrated in this Forum, the active participation of young people has not only been constructive and useful, but it has also been indispensable to formulating the agenda. Our experience demonstrates that this kind of dialogue should continue more consistently and more thoughtfully at the national and international levels.

As a result of the deliberations we have had during this Forum and the extensive consultations that have taken place prior to the Forum, we

have agreed to adopt the African Common Position which contains both a Declaration and a Plan of Action.

In adopting the African Common Position, we have taken into account an assessment made on the performance with respect to the commitments made in 1990. We have observed that some of the commitments were generally implemented. Yet the overall performance has not been satisfactory. In other words, much has been done. But a great deal more which could have been done has not been done.

We have also taken into account that it is not just external factors which impeded the implementation of those commitments. We have indeed recognized that internal factors had also a lot to do with the shortcomings. We have failed to live up to the commitments we made to ourselves and to our people. We have failed to live up to the undertakings we ourselves freely entered into in the two major instruments – the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

We have made use of these experiences and we are determined that things should be different. The African Common Position is geared towards that objective which, put succinctly, aims to better the lot of our children.

Thus this Declaration and Plan of Action cover different areas for action while at the same time stressing that the goals we set for ourselves must be realistic and achievable. The Common Position include all areas of priority action such as measures to enhance life chances for our children, overcoming HIV/AIDS, realizing the rights to education, legal protection, protection of children from violence, neglect, abuse and sexual exploitation. It also covers the important element of youth and children participation and emphasizes the type of actions needed. Action at all levels as well as setting up the appropriate mechanism for monitoring and implementation.

The African Common Position also represents a restatement of the commitment to realize the rights of the child at a national level. The performance of our national governments in terms of implementing their obligations, enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will be the key measure of our commitment to our children and youth. This is also an important document that represents a major step forward in ensuring that the agenda of children and youth in our Continent is fully represented at the global level.

Although this Common Position is essentially intended to be Africa's contribution to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, it is important to stress that what we have agreed here are fundamental issues which require and demand action at various levels. There are things which have to be done in our countries, by our

governments in cooperation with other stakeholders. There are other issues to be taken up at sub-regional and continental levels. And then there are issues which have to be taken up at the international level. We all have to do our part.

**Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The immediate next step after Cairo is for the African Common Position to be taken to the Third Preparatory Committee (Prepcom) meeting for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, which will be held in the week starting 11 June.

I would like to request the Government of Egypt, on behalf of all of us, to present the African Common Position at this Prepcom. Additionally, I suggest that a team made up of the Government of Egypt, the OAU and UNICEF should beforehand brief the African Ambassadors to the UN and share with them the outcome of this Forum. We shall jointly be seeking to ensure that the most significant parts of the African Common Position are incorporated into the draft document, "A World Fit for Children", which the UN is preparing for the UN General Assembly Special Session.

On the side of the OAU, we will present the consensus document at the upcoming OAU Summit in Lusaka for the consideration and adoption by the Heads of State and Government. This will ensure that Africa will speak with one voice at the UNGASS. The process that we have undertaken, that has culminated in the adoption of the African Common Position, has made it possible for Africa to be fully prepared to articulate and present our concerns and visions for Africa's children and youth.

The African Common Position is a lasting document. It is envisaged as a mark of our commitment of what needs to be done by all to realize the rights of the child in Africa.

Let me conclude with three simple messages that sum up the main challenges for Africa's children and youth at the dawn of the 21st Century.

First a message to our Continent's young people: protect yourself against HIV/AIDS.

Second a message to Africa's leaders: stop the involvement of children in war.

And last, a message to everyone, including parents, civil society, governments and the international community: let us educate our children.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that the African Common Position represents an enormous challenge and an opportunity. I wish to pay tribute to all the participants – the representatives of governments, the

representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the representatives of the UN Agencies, especially UNICEF, as well as the representatives of youths and children. But special thanks and tribute should be made to the Chairperson, the First Lady of Egypt, Madam Suzanne Mubarak, for her stewardship, commitment and sensitivity which has contributed immensely to our success. Her participation in our proceedings together with her sisters, the other First Ladies of Africa, has made a huge difference. We are highly appreciative of this. But above all, we look forward to their own unique contribution to sensitizing, mobilizing and, whenever necessary and possible, exerting their own pressure for the implementation of the commitments made here in Cairo.

I thank you.