



ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
AT THE OPENING OF THE 37TH ORDINARY
SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF HEADS
OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

9TH JULY 2001

**Statement by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of
the OAU at the opening of the 37th ordinary Session of
the Assembly of Heads of State and Government**

Lusaka, Zambia, 9th July 2001

I wish to join our host, the President of the Republic of Zambia, in extending a very warm welcome to all the leaders and delegations attending this 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

In our collective endeavour to restore the dignity of the African, Zambia has more than paid its full dues. Our gathering here, therefore, on the threshold of a new beginning for our Continent, is a fitting tribute and an eloquent testimony of the faith and confidence that we have in Zambia and its people. It is also a reflection of the esteem with which we hold our host, President Frederick Chiluba, for his efforts and important contribution to the cause of peace, security and stability on the Continent as exemplified in his unwavering commitment in pursuit of a durable and lasting solution to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I wish to pay tribute to our Chairman, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, for the dedicated manner he has conducted the affairs of our Continent in the last one year and for the support that he has extended to me personally in every aspect of the work of the General Secretariat. From Cote d'Ivoire to the Comoros, from Ethiopia and Eritrea to the Central African Republic, Burundi and the DRC, to mention but a few, our current Chairman, in spite of the challenges that confront his country, has displayed an exemplary commitment to the promotion of African causes and devoted his personal time, to the affairs of our Continent and the advancement of the major issues that are on the agenda of our Continental Organization. His total commitment and unqualified support for the efforts to establish the African Union have been particularly remarkable.

It is also a great pleasure for me to extend a special welcome to a great and accomplished son of our Continent, our brother and friend, Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who has brought great honour to Africa. I extend to him our warmest congratulations on his recent well-deserved re-election and unqualified endorsement to lead the world body. We are particularly proud of his achievements, not the least because of the sterling qualities that he has brought to his office, his dignity, his quiet efficiency and professionalism as well as the clarity with which he has consistently articulated

his vision as Secretary-General of the United Nations. We look forward to working with him and the entire United Nations system, as we strive to operationalize the African Union and address the other challenges that confront our Continent.

Being here in Lusaka for this historic session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, we need to draw inspiration from the many far-reaching decisions that have shaped the history of our Continent in the past, especially, those which were forged in this great city. From the Lusaka Manifesto that reinvigorated the liberation struggle, to the Lusaka Protocol for peace in Angola; from the Lusaka Agreement for a ceasefire in the DRC to the convening of the Lusaka OAU Summit, that is expected to take decisions on the transformation of the Organization into the African Union, we are privileged to take part in the shaping of this Continent's history. By sheer coincidence, the symbolism cannot be lost on us that it is here in Southern Africa, where the OAU had recorded its greatest successes as the Continental Organization that spearheaded the Liberation Struggle, that Africa's new vision for greater unity, is being forged.

In meeting here today, therefore, we are refusing to define our collective existence and the destiny of our Continent, based on the predictions and perceptions of others. Our gathering in Lusaka, Zambia, apart from reflecting the idealism and sense of optimism for the future, also represents our determination to reject the doom and gloom settings that are often used to characterize our reality.

As a student of history, I recall that not many had given the Organization of African Unity, much of a chance of surviving the turbulence that went with the efforts to consolidate the gains of the post-independence era of African politics. It was a period during which our aspiration for greater unity and cohesion in Africa was repeatedly threatened, in spite of the strong vision of a united Continent that many of the Founding Fathers of the OAU advocated and defended jealously. They refused to be intimidated by the daunting nature of the challenges that confronted them.

Today, I appeal to you, the successor generation of leaders and champions of our new Pan African quest, to once again find that innermost African strength to move our

Continent to a new level of unity, which irrespective of country, race, creed, ethnicity and religion, can galvanize our people for action.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

38 years ago our Founding Fathers created this Pan-African Institution to serve as a vehicle for achieving our collective ideals. During the intervening period since then, we have confronted and surmounted numerous challenges.

As we prepare ourselves to transform our Organization into the African Union, it is worth recapitulating, however briefly, the path that we have traversed. You will recall in 1990 at your Summit held in Addis Ababa, you not only expressed a collective vision of where Africa needed to go, but also made a commitment to bring about a different era when the people of this Continent would take full responsibility for defining their destiny. That was a time when profound changes were taking place internationally and which had a major impact on our Continent. It was also a time when Africa was making the final onslaught against colonialism and apartheid. There were great challenges for individual Member States, for the Continent as a whole, and for our Continental Organization. We were at a crossroad.

Today, we can all look back and take pride in our achievements. Our Organization has remained steadfast and consistent in its endeavours. It has not equivocated, it has not hesitated, it has remained intact, and fully engaged in the affairs of this Continent notwithstanding the many constraints we have had to encounter and are still encountering.

We have seen the total eradication of colonialism as well as institutionalised racism. The signing and coming into force of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community was a manifestation of a determination to advance our collective destiny, and a reaffirmation of a strong faith in each other. It marked a resolute effort aimed at fostering closer cooperation and integration among the peoples of our Continent.

In the political sphere, we were anguished and indicted by the horror of escalating conflicts in Africa. In response, we collectively insisted that it is unacceptable, for our Continent to be perceived as one prone to endemic violence, and where peace, security, stability and development are but a distant possibility. The creation of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolutions was thus an important achievement in our quest to ensure the well being of our people.

One other fulfilling element has been our determined effort and success in maintaining the relevance of our Organization internationally. This was not by coincidence or happenstance. Our credibility and legitimacy have come as a result of the seriousness with which we have approached the affairs of our Continental Organization. Increasingly our Member States in particular, and the people of our Continent in general, are according great importance and

extending profound goodwill to our collective undertakings. We have overcome adversities and strengthened our solidarity in the midst of the overwhelming changes that are taking place globally. The OAU, today, maintains close working relations with Africa's global partners and takes an active part in major international negotiations and consultations.

Reinforcing the vitality of our Continental Organization in the new millennium and the new century has been the consensus that has evolved with the elaboration of shared values and principles. The respect for and advancement of democratic modes of governance with a strong emphasis on popular participation, the rejection of unconstitutional changes of government, and the protection of human rights have now become fundamental principles that are not only enshrined in the Constitutive Act of our new Union, but are increasingly being observed as ideals for which collective efforts are being made to internalise and institutionalise in our socio-political systems.

We have committed ourselves collectively in combating all forms of discrimination and removing barriers to women's empowerment. Various initiatives are now being undertaken both nationally and continentally to provide opportunities to African women as our most valuable resource and to ensure their effective participation in the developmental process. Efforts that are currently underway to adopt an additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights relating to Women's Rights in Africa should definitely consolidate these initiatives. I wish to underscore the need for us to ensure a much greater involvement and participation of African women in our development and political processes. This must be also manifested both during the transition as well as the operationalization of the African Union.

Our commitment to the interest and welfare of our children has been reinforced at the Pan-African Forum on the future of Children organized by the OAU in cooperation with UNICEF in Cairo and ably chaired by the First Lady of Egypt, Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak. It is, therefore, also important that we attend at the highest level, the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to children so that we can advocate for a better future for our Continent and for the world's children at large. We have a moral obligation to ensure that our children are given opportunities to grow up in an environment safe from violence and disease. The rights of the child are at the very heart of just societies.

Excellencies,

My third mandate comes to an end in September this year. This is the 12th year since I assumed office as Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity. I consider it to be a great honour and privilege bestowed upon me by the

leaders, governments and peoples of this Continent, to serve our beloved Continent for all these years. I am grateful for the confidence and support that I received from all the leaders and governments of our Continent. I am also highly appreciative of the various national honours that have been conferred on me by different African countries.

Allow me, Your Excellencies, to express particular gratitude to my country, the United Republic of Tanzania, to the President, Government and to all my compatriots who have accompanied me all the way and consistently supported me during the many years of my public service at the national, Continental and International levels. There is no greater forum than here to acknowledge this fact and to express sincere thanks to my country and to my Continent.

I wish also to pay tribute to the tremendous contribution which has been made and continues to be made by the staff of the General Secretariat at all levels. Their commitment, their Pan-Africanism and their readiness to work at sometimes in very difficult conditions and circumstances have clearly made a great difference.

It was a singular privilege for me just before the end my third term in office, to have had the opportunity of joining hands with you, to lay the foundation for the implementation of the historic Sirte Declaration and the subsequent decisions relating to the African Union. I wish to pay tribute to all our leaders for the courageous steps that you have taken for Africa. This has been a noble undertaking for which future generations in this Continent will owe you a debt of gratitude.

Undoubtedly, the African Union is one of the greatest achievements of this Continent, symbolizing the realization of the aspirations of great Pan-Africanists and the Founding Fathers of our Continental Organization. As we look forward to the deliberations of this Summit on the concrete issues related to the materialization of the Union, it is important to underscore that the people of Africa have great expectations and also questions about our cherished Union.

It is evident that there is no dearth of political commitment to this grand project in as far as our Member States are concerned. In a remarkable demonstration of this commitment it is gratifying to note that as we open this Summit today, 50 out of the 53 Member States of our Continental Organization have now ratified the Constitutive Act establishing the African Union. This is indeed a remarkable feat and record-breaking phenomenon in so far as the ratification of important Conventions in our Continent is concerned. The challenge for all of us is how to translate this political commitment into concrete action.

This Summit must, therefore, provide answers to the questions that occupy the minds of our people, including the form and nature of the African Union that we are establishing. Is the African Union merely the OAU in a different name? What difference will the Union make in addressing the day-to-day challenges that confront the ordinary African including the burning issues of poverty, HIV-AIDS, external indebtedness, natural and man-made disasters? What impact the African Union will have in our fight against conflicts that will bleed our people and destroy our resources and infrastructure? Will the Union promote the empowerment of women and ensure their mainstreaming in our peace and developmental efforts. Will it bring greater coordination, fairer societies, unity and integration to deal not only with challenges imposed upon us from outside our Continent but also with challenges beyond our Continent? In a nutshell, will the Union be able to overcome the contemporary challenges in much the same way as the OAU did when it confronted the challenges of colonization and racism and the promotion of an African identity and dignity? Will the African Union be an instrument for the improvement of the lot of our people – give hope where there is despair, give confidence where there is resignation?

These are some of the issues, which are in the minds of our people, some of which were raised by participants at the first-ever OAU-Civil Society Conference held in Addis Ababa last month. In my opinion, the answer is clear. The Union will definitely be a tool for the enhancement of our cooperation, greater unity and a further step from what we have now. It should advance the pursuit of our collective endeavours, including the initiative of evolving a new plan for Continental development. It should also facilitate the recreation of a new relationship with partners in the international community based on mutual respect.

The Constitutive Act provides the political and institutional underpinnings of our desired union in terms of the basic framework. Now that we are embarking on establishing the structures of the Union, it is imperative that further guidelines be developed with a view of identifying the modalities of ensuring that the enhanced unity that we have committed ourselves to forge, is fully and effectively embedded into the organs and institutions which we are about to establish.

This is a time of tremendous promise and opportunity for Africa. We must make great capital of this sense of hope and possibility, as a foundation upon which we can secure and construct the future of our Continent. There is, I believe, a coincidence of great opportunity and we need to seize both the moment and the opportunity.

I thank you.