**ADDRESS BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF TANZANIA AND
FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
AT CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM LEADERS PEACE
CONFERENCE**

**"CONFLICTS IN AFRICA AND WHAT CHRISTIAN
AND MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADERS CAN
CONTRIBUTE TO BRING ABOUT PEACE AND
RECONCILIATION".**

GIRAFFE OCEAN VIEW HOTEL

**DAR ES SALAAM
3 SEPTEMBER 2008**

His Grace Bishop Josia Idou Fearon, Chairperson of

PROCMURA Africa,

His Grace Bishop Alex Malasusa, Chairperson of

PROCMURA Tanzania,   -

The Honourable Acting Mufti of Tanzania, Sheikh

Suleiman Gorogosi,

- Ite Suly the y BMCvaite Eue Plyli heas the form

His Grace Bishop Donald Mtetemela, Chairman,

Christian Council of Tanzania,

Reverend Dr. Johnson Mbillah, General Adviser

PROCMURA Africa,

Reverend Dr. Leonard Mtaita, Secretary General,

Christian Council Tanzania.

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Chairperson,

Distinguished participants,

I am honoured to be invited and to address this eminent gathering. Much as you have referred to this congregation as a conference and the Kiswahili invitation describes it as a 'Kongamano' – in my view, the caliber of participants and the subject you intend to address make this meeting to be above the everyday meaning of those words. A meeting of religious leaders from the main denominations of our regions, devoted to discussing the subject of peace and reconciliation is a profound and powerful event. Your

responsibility to our Creator, your stature and influence in society, combined with the deeper meaning of peace in both Islam and Christianity give this gathering a unique significance. I wish to pay sincere tributes to the initiators of this process and to the organizers of this meeting. In particular, I commend the Christian Council of Tanzania for hosting this peace conference.

As leaders of Christian and Muslim communities you do have a special responsibility in our two regions. There is no doubt that the majority of the people of Eastern and Central Africa, and indeed of the whole continent, belong to these two faith communities. Your influence as social and spiritual guides has a profound impact in the overall wellbeing of many of us. This meeting reflects a positive reaffirmation of a commitment on your

part to cooperate and collaborate in fulfilling collective responsibilities. Undoubtedly, the outcome of such an initiative is to reinforce the noble spirit of understanding, cooperation and tolerance among the adherents of the two faiths, a process which in itself consolidates the foundation for peace and stability in our Continent.

Chairperson,

Distinguished participants,

In the past three decades the people of our Continent have experienced the horrors and devastation associated with the breakdown of peace and security. We have witnessed *coup d'état*; civil wars; genocide; rebel insurgencies; and violent confrontations among nations. Lives have

been lost, limbs maimed, property damaged, and worst of all hope and prospects destroyed.

Conflicts have been a curse on our continent. They have caused untold suffering, loss of life and limb and destruction of property. They engender hatred and a culture of violence within our societies. They traumatize generations of Africans and undermine the very fabric of our societies. They affect the most productive section of our societies and jeopardise the chances of African children to have a decent and dignified life. They have devastated our women and in the process undermine a crucial component of our societies. They produce orphans and armed children and constitute a fundamental obstacle to our socio-economic endeavours.

Conflicts remain, by and large, the main root cause of humanitarian tragedies in our continent which has the in enviable record of hosting the largest number of refugees and displaced persons. Furthermore, as a result of unbearable burden created by the massive influx of refugees to countries of asylum the environmental degradation caused and resentments and frustrations generated among local populations, there has been a decline in the traditional African compassion and hospitality towards the refugees.

Distinguished participants,

At the dawn of independence, we as Africans rallied around our leaders and governments in pursuing a vision of building nationhood and overcoming the differences exaggerated by

colonialism. There was a quest to strengthen the institutions of governance and to confront the challenges of poverty, disease and lack of formal education among many others. Despite the different paths countries took, there was a determination to invest our collective energy in forging unity, solidarity and to achieving what we had been denied through the centuries of slavery and colonial domination as well as apartheid. We united in nationalist and liberation movements with a hope that we will eliminate the artificially forged differences of ethnicity, race, regionalism, access to wealth and religion. In most cases, we endeavoured, even at that early stage, to establish the foundation for a harmonious co-existence in our respective faiths as Christians, Muslims as well as other religions.

That early period was one of hope and great expectations because we acknowledged that Africa is a blessed continent – with its resilient people, massive expanse of fertile land, precious minerals and other natural resources, as well as the most favourable weather. We are also blessed because of the wealth of social diversity that marks our character as African people – in terms of cultures and traditions, in terms of race, spiritualism as well as social and political institutions. We are blessed because we have a proud history of indigenous leadership which is rich and profound in terms of values, norms and responsibilities. Our notion of leadership, that you as religious people also represent, is all-encompassing and relates to the past, the present, the future and the hereafter. This is the Africa that endows us with a collective

identity and which distinguishes us from the others.

Unfortunately, the seeds of eroding this idyllic vision and expectation of our Continent and germinating the evil of violent conflicts were sown on January 13 1963. It was on that day when the first President of the Republic of Togo – Sylvanus Olympio – was murdered in cold blood and the military took over the reins of government. We may have forgotten this event, but it was a very significant episode in the history of this continent.

Quite at that early stage it marked the beginning of a trend that was by then only common in Latin America, in parts of Asia and in the Middle East-that is, change of government through military take-over - in other words *coup d'état* . In the

following three decades Africa witnessed dozens of military take over, with all the attendant consequences. The most recent one being the toppling of a democratically elected President of Mauritania, Sidi Mohammed Ould Sheikh Abdallahi some three weeks ago.

It can be conceded that the phenomenon of *coup d'état in* general reflects an expression of dissatisfaction and grievances among some factions of society and weaknesses of the internal democratic institutions. Nevertheless, our experience in these last three decades has also confirmed that military takeover in itself has not been able to address the underlying causes of those dissatisfactions. In fact, in many instances it has only triggered continuing tension and instability in the affected countries. Of even more

serious concern is the elevation of violence and force into becoming the moral imperative for either effecting political change or maintaining stability. The prevalence of such a political culture undermined the basic foundation of societal sustainability through shared norms and values, a sense of spirituality, respect for the sanctity of life; as well as consolidation of peace and harmony. In other words, Coup d'état asserted the morality of power, intimidation, repression and the threat to life.

By the late 1970s and into the 80s, there was a proliferation in the use of force and violence degenerating beyond the organized institution of the military into the 'rebel movements'. Unlike coups, which are often restricted in terms of execution to the institution of the military, rebel

movements incorporate factions that are outside the army and permeate society itself. It is an escalation of conflicts, leading not only to massive physical destruction but also to the rupturing of the social fabric. Identities are threatened, relationships destroyed, humanity demonized, and the foundation of faith communities undermined. It is in this context important to bear in mind that in conflict situations the perpetration of violence goes beyond religious affiliation. In most cases, the murders and destruction in conflict situations are inflicted by and to members of the same faith communities.

For us as Africans our lowest moment was the occurrence of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. It represented humanity at its worst when for 100 days not only internal political and social

institutions failed to protect but also in some cases even facilitated the systematic murdering of close to a million innocent civilians. While this was happening the international community stood by and watched without taking any action. More than in any other tragedy, the Rwanda genocide underscores the collective guilt and responsibility that we all bear in ensuring peace and security not simply of governments and borders, but of the people of this Continent. The events leading to those three months, the manner in which the evil was executed, the nature of its victims confirm that the dynamic of genocide were nurtured within society.

As the then Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity, under the guidance of African Heads of State and Government, I appointed an

International Panel of Eminent Personalities chaired by the Former President of Botswana, Sir. Ketumile Masire to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events. The title of their final report captures tragedy that took place and the implications for all of us as Africans and especially as leaders. They called it - THE PREVENTABLE GENOCIDE – indicating that there were steps that could have been taken before and immediately when it started that could have arrested that terrible massacre.

In the report, the eminent personalities observe, and I quote:

If there is anything worse than the genocide itself, it is the knowledge that it did not have to happen. The simple, harsh, truth is that the genocide was not inevitable; and that it would

have been relatively easy to stop it from
happening prior to April 6, 1994, and then to
mitigate the destruction significantly once it
began. In the words of one expert, "This was
the most easily preventable genocide
imaginable."

While still on this broad overview of the nature of African conflicts, let me briefly remark on the phenomenon of conflicts among African nations, which at times have also culminated into inter-state wars. For us in Tanzania we do remember the unfortunate developments in 1979 that triggered a war between ourselves and Uganda under Iddi Amin. More recently however, from May 1998 to June 2000, the two nations of Eritrea and Ethiopia were involved in a devastating war that led to tens of thousands of their citizens killed or

wounded as a direct consequence of the conflict, costing hundreds of millions of dollars to their fragile economies.

At a much larger scale was the Great Lakes conflict, which some commentators described as Africa's Third World War, involving about eight African countries and a score of independent rebel groups. And a variant of this has been the Mano River conflict where rebel group sometimes sponsored by people like Charles Taylor and other leaders created mayhem among the states of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The same complication currently prevails in the relationship between Chad and Sudan where instability in the respective nations is compounded by the existence of rebel groups in the two countries.

All what I have described up to this point illustrates the different forms in which violent conflict has manifested itself in our continent. I wish to reiterate that each of these forms has brought about massive damage to the wellbeing of our nations and our people. Africa has the dubious distinction of being among the regions having large number of refugees, displaced persons and orphans in the world. By last year 2007, close to 3 million people were living in refugees conditions and more than 7 million were displaced from their permanent settlements. Indeed, while the millions of orphans currently found in Africa are mainly the outcome of the HIV pandemics, quite a substantial number are also a result of the internecine conflicts of the past decades. Even when children are not orphaned they have constituted the major victims of wars and conflicts by growing up in the difficult

conditions of deprivation, instability and denied prospects of the future. I do hope that some of you have heard of that story of the little girl who was asked as to what she would like to be when she grows up. Her response was: 'To be Alive'!!

Distinguished participants,

All those forms of conflicts and their violent manifestation are mainly underlined by causes which are part and parcel of our social and political existence as a people. In addition the situation is rendered even graver with the continent also falling victim to external manipulation mainly associated to the resources which Africa has been blessed with. And while that is happening, our capacity to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts as well as to sustain the reconstruction process

when the conflict has ended seems to be inadequate.

Almost in all cases, the underlying causes for the outbreak of violent conflict in Africa have been associated with a justifiable or manipulated sense of alienation and exclusion on the part of one or more sections of society. It is the sense of not being part of the polity in expressing voice, in accessing collective benefits the society has offer, and in taking part in defining the destiny of society. It is a breakdown in the shared vision, values and norms and a feeling of unequal treatment by what are seen to be the others. Invariably conflicts in Africa has been connected with a breakdown in the perception of fairness to an acute degree where the meaning of existence seems to be lost and

sections of citizens are prepared to pay the ultimate price- that is, life.

Under normal circumstances, perceptions of alienation and exclusion, or inequality and unfairness are expected to be easily addressed by the institutions of governance – be these political parties, local governments, parliaments or court systems. In the same regard, institutions that provide stewardship on issues of norms and values, on shaping perceptions, and on maintaining spiritual wellbeing often times play a part in refining moral standing of citizens and inculcating norms and values which uphold an harmonious existence. In this respect, the outbreak of conflict is first and foremost an indication that the secular institutions of governance have not been robust

enough to accommodate differences and to reconcile them.

The African experience seems also to present a challenge pertaining to institutions that provide normative and spiritual guidance. Indeed, it is acknowledged that it is an over-simplification to suggest *a priori* that conflict is also a demonstration of lapses on the part of these institutions. Nevertheless, the fact that citizens in conflicts have at times responded and behaved in a manner in which no scripture would condone such behaviour as rape, murder, brutal maiming of limbs – does point out to certain deficiencies of those perpetrators. It may suggest that there are people who have not yet accepted the message that life is sacred, that a just cause also needs just means of pursuing it. Clearly religious leaders and

Institutions need to do more in inculcating among the faithful the sprit of tolerance, understanding, peace and reconciliation.

I am aware that in many instances you as religious leaders and as custodians of righteousness and moral wellbeing may find yourselves in situations of difficult judgement. Because of your responsibility as stewards of justice and fairness there are occasions when you may find yourselves and your congregations becoming of victims of conflict due to positions of principle that you may be compelled to take. I leave it to your meeting to deliberate on the complexity of such dilemmas and their implications for contributing to peace and reconciliation.

Indeed, past experience has also exposed another dimension relating to the origins of conflicts in our Continent. There are occasions when our plight and differences are exploited by some forces external to us leading to a magnification of those divergences and the triggering violent conflicts. There is a popular wisdom in our Continent commenting on the disturbing pattern of intractable conflicts in locations where precious resources such as oil and minerals seem to exist. The people in areas where such resources are found have only been victims suffering the horrors of violence and instability while the benefits of resources are siphoned off outside the respective countries. In many of such incidences, the capacity to prevent and overcome the manipulation taking place has been either weak or miserably lacking.

How can religious leaders contribute to ensuring peace and reconciliation in our Continent?

I would like to submit that you and your colleagues elsewhere in the continent do have a major role to play, not only in bringing about peace and reconciliation, but equally significant - in preventing the breakdown of peace and security among our people.

A bulk of the 800 million African people derives their social and spiritual guidance from your leadership. By virtue of your status as religious leaders a majority of these people listen to you, look up to you, and turn to you at times of their inner difficulties and tensions. You are designated to provide them with the foundation for developing norms and values to guide their eternal lives.

Perhaps more needs to be done in re-asserting this unique and privileged position that religious leaders have in our lives as African citizens. Your message of peace, tolerance and shared humanity goes a long way in restricting the scope of differences to degenerate into violent conflict.

A message that accepts and celebrates the African diversity – in its multiracial nature, its multi-ethnic composition, multicultural and variation in faith will definitely consolidate this feature into becoming an asset rather than a liability. I do believe that the scriptures underscore our common descendent and the shared acknowledgement that there is a Higher Power who created us. I do get an impression at times that our relationship as Muslims and Christians is sometimes strained because we do not sufficiently engage each other.

We do not take time to know and understand each other. We rush to condemn and pass judgement. Once again I pay tribute to this programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa- PROCMURA. It is a valuable initiative, let us all support it.

I had mentioned earlier in my address that the 1963 *coup d'état* in Togo exalted the principle of force and violence and made it part of our political existence. It substituted the higher morality that religious leaders inculcate to us for our spiritual wellbeing. The sacredness of life; the inner essence of humanity, brotherhood, solidarity; peace and the unity of the universe and the cosmos; the linkage between the present and the hereafter; justice and righteousness. All these are the primary creed that if fully internalize will negate the evil of force and violence when we seek for inner peace

and reconciliation within our own souls and with those of the others.

An Africa without conflict is an aspiration that we all have. The reality on the ground is that conflicts are now with us, we failed to prevent them. Your meeting is asking, what can religious leaders do at this juncture? Once again, I respond that you have a role in managing the escalation of these conflicts and the ultimate reconciliation and resolution, directly and indirectly. The bureaucrats in government, the politicians, the fighters, and the victims are members of your respective congregations. As a matter of fact, you are the closest people who live with the stakeholders, apart from yourselves also being stakeholders. You can organise yourselves to use your networks and channels of communication to convey messages of

peace and reconciliation. I am reliably informed that a recent conflict in a nearby country confirmed that in neighbourhoods where community leaders took a firm position to organize for peace and reconciliation violence did not take place even though members of the adversary communities were also living there.

Your role in de-escalating conflicts and promoting reconciliation should not necessarily be ad-hoc, marginal and informal. As institutions you need to build systems and capacities for conflict mediation, reconciliation and resolution. A new generation of negotiators needs to be trained with mediation skills and complementary infrastructure is needed to support the inter-governmental facilities that are being put in place under the auspices of the African Union and the United Nations.

The task of peace making and peace keeping should not be allowed to remain as an upstream undertaking taking place in high level conference rooms involving mainly national leadership. I was moved by the reaction of a peasant who was forced to flee a recent post-election violence. While applauding the final deal that brought the conflict to an end, he asked a poignant question – 'what about my reconciliation with my neighbour who still has my cow! His statement only underscores the need for reconciliation to reach the grassroots where the original animosity was manifested and where peace has to prevail. You as religious leaders are best positioned to play that role.

As I conclude, I should also point out that a major challenge for peace and reconciliation is also in

ensuring its sustainability. We have witnessed in this continent frequent violations of terms of reconciliation agreement and the resumption of hostilities among adversaries. More critical is the task of reconstructing the social, psychological and physical damage that has been inflicted among the population. The re-building of lives is a long and protracted process which requires resources, organisation, determination and perseverance. After the tragedies of the last 30 years, Africa is now at that stage where it giving priority to reconstruction and the establishment of durable peace.

You and your colleagues elsewhere in Africa have a lot to contribute .Your vision; your capacities and your closeness to the people are precious assets at this stage of African development. Above all, in

your role as spiritual leaders you can do a lot in assisting the African people to re-possess their humanity and to re-kindle their hope for a decent life of peace now and in the hereafter.

I thank you!