

# THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION



## DEMOCRACY DAY LECTURE

BY

DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM

ON

### **DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY, PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA**

*International Conference Centre,  
Abuja, Nigeria  
29<sup>th</sup> May 2002*

**SALIM AHMED SALIM: DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGES  
OF POVERTY, PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA**

**Your Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the  
Federal Republic of Nigeria,**

**Your Excellency, Vice President Atiku Abubakar and Mrs. Atiku,  
Chairman of the Occasion, Chief Anthony Enahoro,**

**Your Excellency the Senate President,**

**Your Excellency the Deputy Speaker of the House of  
Representatives representing the Speaker,**

**Honourable The Chief Justice of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,**

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Honourable Members of the Senate and the House of  
Representatives,**

**Chairman of Political Parties,**

**Your Royal Highnesses and Your Excellencies,**

**Chief Executives of Parastatals and Permanent Secretaries,**

**Members of Diplomatic Corps,**

**All Other Protocols Observed,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

I should like at the outset, to express my appreciation to His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the invitation he so kindly addressed to me, to deliver this year's Democracy Day Lecture. I feel greatly honoured to be accorded this privilege of addressing you on an occasion that carries a profound meaning to the people of Nigeria.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to His Excellency President Olusegun Obasanjo, to the Government, and to the people of Nigeria, for the achievements represented by this auspicious occasion. The symbolism of this day cannot be lost because it goes beyond the borders of this great country, inspiring all those who are struggling to realize the democratic ideal.

Indeed, a celebration of the entrenchment and consolidation of democracy in any one African country, and more so in Nigeria, is a triumph for the whole Continent and for every African. I join you in celebrating this day of pride, and I continue to pray for the consolidation and sustenance of peace, stability and prosperity for the people of Nigeria.

I am grateful for the warmth of welcome and the hospitality that has been extended to me since my arrival in Nigeria. I am gratified by the friendship that I continue to enjoy with the leadership and people of this country. I am therefore, especially delighted to be in the midst of so many old friends and colleagues who have, devoted their energies and time, to the shaping and advancement of not just the Nigerian, but our common African humanity.

Returning to Nigeria once again, to bear witness to the dynamism and the potentials of this great country and its peoples, has been an exhilarating experience for me. For contrary to the negative predictions of the so-called Afro-pessimists, our faith in this Country's ability to successfully manage the difficult and delicate transition from military rule to a democratic dispensation, has proved to be well-founded. Indeed, the holding of this lecture is yet another eloquent testimony to the progress that has been made in the area of democratisation. It also reflects the strong determination of President Obasanjo and his Government to forge ahead and consolidate the new dispensation of democratisation in Nigeria, notwithstanding the formidable obstacles and challenges that confront this country and our continent as a whole.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is today marking the 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the restoration of democracy. It is indeed befitting to underscore the significance of such a day in our Continent. This is not merely an occasion to commemorate an important event that took place in Nigeria, or simply marking a life of an achievement that has become three years old.

A day of such a nature has a deeper meaning for all us as Africans. It provides an occasion to remind ourselves of where we come from in the long and arduous journey in the pursuit of our destiny as a people of our respective nations. It gives us an opportunity to reflect on the milestones we have attained and the challenges confronting us. It inspires and rededicates us to our commitments, and it reaffirms the determination of attaining our collective vision.

I wish also to preface my lecture by underscoring the need to strongly support the efforts of the Government in Nigeria. I do so on the basis of my firm belief that it is only a Nigeria that is at peace with itself and one that is stable, secure and strong enough, that can assume its rightful place and destined role in the African family and in the community of

nations. It is also patently true, that only a Nigeria reconciled with itself can make a difference, both to its people, to the region, and to the continent, as well as to our common humanity.

In expressing my strong and unshakeable confidence on Nigeria, I do so in the full knowledge and conviction, that the process of democratisation that is taking place in Nigeria, will not only endure, but will contribute to the continental efforts directed at strengthening the institutions of democracy and good governance.

### **Excellencies**

### **My dear friends**

This occasion could not have been better timed and the location could also not be more appropriate. In about one month from now, the new African Union will be launched in Durban, South Africa. President Obasanjo and his peers have been quite determined and instrumental to the shaping of the future destiny of this continent. Their determination to bequeath to the future generations of Africans, a new dispensation that only a few year's back, seemed almost impossible, is worthy of our commendation.

Secondly, in about one year from now, the people of Nigeria, will be called upon again to exercise their sovereign will of electing their leaders. It seems therefore appropriate and timely to engage in discussions around the theme of "Democratic Governance and the Challenges of Poverty, Peace and Security in Africa" which is the topic that I have been requested to speak to you on.

Let me begin by stating an obvious fact that at the heart of the contemporary challenges confronting our continent, is the whole issue of Governance. It is my conviction that in Africa today, good and democratic governance can play a catalytic role in the design and implementation of a viable strategy for economic recovery and development and for addressing the challenges to peace, security and stability on our continent. For Nigeria and the other states in Africa, democratic governance must continue to be at the centre of their development policies and strategies. This is particularly so, because democracy, popular participation and good governance provide the enabling environment for economic transformation and development, as they also provide the necessary latitude and possibilities for addressing

the scourge of internal and inter-state conflicts that are either simmering or raging in different parts of the continent.

I remain therefore more than convinced that in this new millennium and as we strive to lay the foundations of our new African Union, the challenge that confronts our African family, is how to forge ahead with the democratisation process, and particularly, how to create and/or strengthen the institutions that enhance good governance, as well as the building of peace, and the promotion of socio-economic development. Needless to say, all these issues are inter-related.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Perhaps, at this stage, it may be useful to pose a question. What do we mean when we talk of democratic governance in Africa? Is it simply a new fad in town, which is forcing us as Africans to strive in appearing politically correct by referring to the western and liberal 'democracy' in this apparently more sophisticated manner? Or, does it have a more profound meaning, which underscores the traits of a framework of

political and socio-economic relations in society, which galvanizes and engages the whole society in the quest for self-realization?

Clearly – democratic governance is not simply a fad that Africa is trying to copy. If anything, it is the fundamental essence of the struggles of the African people throughout history, and it is the basic aspiration in our peoples' existence. It is precisely for this reason that African people do not need to be preached about embracing democratic governance because they have shed their blood for it, and lost the lives of their kith and kin, and for it they have made many sacrifices.

In essence, democratic governance refers to a political and socio-economic framework in which every individual and every community becomes an equal member of society, and is provided with a space of engagement in shaping the destiny of society. It incorporates relations, norms, values, procedures, institutions, duties and obligations. It is a totality that encompasses the political, social and economic domains in a mutually reinforcing and symbiotic manner.

Democratic governance is not simply structures or only rituals; it is also a modality of behaviour and interaction. It constitutes relations as well

as values to be internalized. It is a means of societal empowerment. And with such a complex composition, democratic governance is not a 'one-off' static phenomenon to be juxtaposed or grafted into a society. It is a dynamic process that is nurtured and enriched with the growth and evolution of a society.

I need to also point out in this regard, that democratic governance is not only a relationship between state and society, but it also refers to relationships within society. At this second level, it underscores such virtues as tolerance, dialogue and understanding, social integration, gender equality, abidance to norms, respect for fundamental human rights, adherence to the rule of law and negation of corruption.

In the past decade, Africa has embarked in full earnest on a path of building democratic governance in our respective societies. It is doing this with the background of the experience of more than three decades of one party-states, military dictatorships, as well as authoritarian regimes in a majority of countries. During these 30 years of non-democratic forms of governance, not only has the lot of our people deteriorated, but also the excuse often given of establishing

dictatorships so as to promote growth and economic development has not materialized.

As Africa enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is reckoned that by conventional indices, the majority of our people are materially worse off than they were 30 years ago. In the same regard, the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium finds Africa with structures of governance and administration that are still striving to gain vitality and effectiveness; that are lacking in effective popular participation; and in many cases encumbered with the scourge of corruption.

In a large measure, Africa's predicament can be attributed to its colonial history and to the impact of unfavourable global circumstances prevailing on it. Nevertheless, it is also not untrue that the 30 years absence of democratic governance has also contributed to the abject and excruciating poverty prevailing in our Continent, to rampant conflicts and instability, and to the collapse of human security among our people. Putting it in other words, dictatorship and authoritarianism, benevolent or otherwise, failed to alter the inherited structures and to deliver even the material well being of the African people.

Worse still, non-democratic forms of governance in Africa have tended to generate and compound problems of ethnicity, religion, race and even regionalism. The process of nation building begun by our Founding Fathers was disrupted by the three decades of dictatorships and authoritarianism in the Continent. As a mode of survival, the tendency among some of our people was to revert to primordial identities and affinities, thus compounding the further fragmentation of our nations.

For Africa, therefore, the construction of the edifice of democratic governance has to take place simultaneously with the task of completing the process of nation building and at the same time overcoming the social and economic legacies of the non-democratic era. Concretely, the process of democratization in Africa has to go hand in hand with the struggle for poverty eradication, combating sectarianism, ethnicity, and xenophobia in general, as well as promoting stability and security. Indeed, it is a tall order, but it has to be addressed.

For the people of Nigeria, and for Africa as a whole, to underscore and commit themselves to the democratic path is the only rational choice. We have no other option but to persist along this path, however difficult it may be. Moreover, global conditions are now favourable for this

process. There has been no other epoch in the whole history of humankind when the traditions of democratic governance have been on the ascendancy globally than in the present period.

An important goal that has to be borne in mind consistently is that for our people to make sense of democratic governance it has to translate itself into the improvement of their social and material conditions. Undoubtedly, coming from a background of dictatorship and authoritarianism, democracy is in itself a virtue, because it redeems dignity and human value to the citizens. However, that cannot be adequate to ensure its sustainability.

For democratic governance to have meaning to the people, it has to contribute to the alleviation and eradication of the burning problems of their daily existence. It is neither cynicism nor a mark of rejection when the people sometimes complain that they cannot eat democracy. All it implies, is that the system of governance has to tackle the problems of poverty as manifested in the deprivations associated with education, health care, employment, housing, safety and security. It has to provide for mechanisms that prevent exclusionism and violent conflicts. In

general, it has to lead to the improvement of the people's welfare, enhancing their security and consolidating the nation's stability.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Ours is a blessed Continent, endowed with a rich potential of resources, vibrant and robust institutions, and a large as well as resilient population.

Yet, this is the same Continent that is ravaged with the most pervasive and excruciating poverty. 42 years after the independence of many African countries the material lot of the majority of our people has not improved significantly and the potential of our resources has not been deployed to uplift the standards of living of our people.

Our predicament is not due to lack of trying. In each of our nations, we have launched a number of well meaning initiatives and strategies, both received from outside, as well as homegrown. Similarly, at a Continental level, we have had a number of initiatives, including The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act; Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery; The African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment

Programme for Socio-Economic Transformation; The Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and The Cairo Agenda for Action.

There is a common affliction in all these initiatives. The people of Africa have not been playing a central role in all these undertakings. I believe that the more than 800 Million people of Africa constitute a powerful force that can definitely re-dynamize the development process if effectively engaged. It is this faith in the latent capacity for self emancipation that a decade ago we underscored the importance of creating an enabling environment at all levels for popular participation in development and transformation.

We all seem to recognize this factor, though more in rhetoric than in the actual operationalization of programmes.

The tragedy of not engaging our people has been the failure of these initiatives due to the lack of popular dynamism, and the absence of indigenous ownership and the basis for sustainability. The people's non-engagement has also led to the entrenchment of the poverty situation, which ultimately impinges on the thriving of democratic governance. A

vicious cycle is thus created. Poverty contributes to undermining democratic governance, which impinges on popular participation, which sustains poverty, and thus the cycle continues.

Within this cycle, I do not have to underscore the tensions that arise, generating conflicts over meagre resources, fostering gender inequality, impairing the capacities of combating the HIV-AIDS pandemic, Malaria and other disasters looming on us.

Speaking of democratic governance, it is also my firm belief, having traversed the length and breadth of this continent in my previous life as Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity, that in spite of setbacks here and there, the process of democratisation on the continent, is more or less irreversible. I have also an abiding faith in the fact that the concepts of democracy and good governance are gradually but steadily gaining root in our continent. Indeed, the wind of democracy that has been blowing across the continent, both augurs well for the future of our continent but also presents us with formidable challenges. But then, the ongoing process should lead us to good governance and good governance should in turn, ensure the sustainability of democracy in Africa. If this premise is accepted, good

governance must be seen as a generally accepted process that recognizes the centrality of the people in decision making at all levels. My first conclusion therefore, is that good governance must allow for the full participation of the people in national development endeavours, particularly, in our quest to alleviate poverty in our continent and the maintenance of peace and security in Africa.

There are clear lessons in Africa to demonstrate that the people must be allowed to lead and manage the processes of development. This can be done through a fair process that allows the government and the people to develop and nurture common values and aspirations and to collectively address common challenges. Governance in Africa must entail a process in which the people are empowered and have sufficient latitude to set out priorities for their socio-economic, political and other developmental needs. This speaks to the need to empower the civil society in our countries, particularly, the women of our continent who have given so much to Mother Africa, but only end up in the periphery of the decision-making processes in our continent.

## **Excellencies**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Challenge facing us today is to consolidate and expand the democratic dispensation and directing it to improve the condition of African people. They will not make a difference between democratic and non-democratic forms of governance if there is no difference in their existential conditions. On the other hand, we should not under-estimate the successes we have achieved so far, because the task is quite enormous. Its realization is a process and not a single event. The most important principle is that we should not despair. Neither should we allow ourselves to be complacent in realizing this ideal.

It is out of the recognition of the complexity of our predicament and the enormity of the challenges facing us that throughout the past decade, the process of promoting democratic governance has been recognized to be a national as well as local and community undertaking, but at the same time it is a process that needs to be accelerated and reinforced at the Continental level.

Our Continent has reached a stage now where the 'no-go' area is gradually contracting. The Algiers Decision by the OAU Assembly, on the rejection of un-constitutional changes, and its further elaboration at the Lome Summit marks a significant development in promoting democratic governance in our Continent and it making this task to be a collective responsibility. The various principles enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union have a major bearing on the pursuit of the democratic ideal. Indeed, the cloak of national sovereignty can no longer be used as a shield for oppressing African people. We do all acknowledge that the instruments are not quite sufficient, but at least, we are moving in the right direction.

The success of this endeavour will very much depend on the leadership of our nations, their fidelity to the mandate entrusted upon them by people and the vigilance of our people. The people of this Continent have always remained determined to pursue the democratic path. It is the leadership of our various institutions of governance who have at times let them down. The challenge of democratic governance is thus also the obligation on the part of the electorate to identify and support the right leadership in our Continent.

Having said this, it is important to bear in mind certain historic factors of our continent. Today, and regrettably so, in many parts of Africa including here in Nigeria, we have at times experienced sharp ethnic and religious differences which have stood in the way of an overriding sense of national community thereby complicating the process of democratisation. Your country like most of African countries is a mosaic of peoples, cultures, and religions with a rich array of institutions. It is a microcosm of Africa endowed with a vibrancy that makes a difference. The challenge confronting all of is how to use this rich diversity to be a source of strength instead of division thereby strengthening democratic governance and uplift the lot of our people. Nigeria's success in managing diversity within a democratic framework of governance, and using it as a strength and asset for development is a major contribution that it can make to Africa's struggle for promoting a democratic culture.

Let me stress the importance of the Human Rights Agenda both in Nigeria and in our continent as a whole. It is undeniable fact that African countries have seen serious violations of human rights. People have been killed, sent to prisons and detention camps, their dignity violated and many a time uprooted from their homes. There came a time when the international community came to consider this to be the

'norm' in Africa. Nigeria, and many countries in the Continent, had a fair share in all this. I would like to urge all Nigerians now to be in the forefront in the observance of human rights norms and to practice tolerance among themselves. It is true that states, by definition, are coercive and at times do violate the rights of individuals. But rampant human rights violations do take place also among the people themselves, in their day-to-day interactions. This can only be stopped if people practice tolerance. Inculcating and/or consolidating a culture of tolerance in our societies must be integrally part of the Democratic Governance.

I am also convinced that it is only when national leaders build a broad based understanding that they can fight the challenges of poverty, instability and insecurity in all of our countries, and which challenges have undermined our peace and development agenda. I will not be saying anything new in stating that in many of our countries economic malaise and social dislocations, continue to generate social tensions and political discontent. This combination of economic difficulties, social unrest and political violence often has implications which extended outside the borders of the states concerned.

It is also important to acknowledge the fact that the recent history of many of our states, has been characterized by deep socio-economic crises, arising from the wrong policies of the past, mal-administration, mismanagement and corruption, the excruciating debt burden as well as unfavourable global economic conditions. Africa's economic performance has continued to be appalling. The continent's GDP has continued to go down, and agricultural production in many countries has slumped. At the end of the last century, Africa had only 2% of the global GNP. Africa is faced with a development crisis of great portent.

Faced with this unfavourable socio-economic environment and in-order to face the challenges and vagaries of globalisation, we need to strengthen solidarity within each of our countries and among our countries. This is why the recent decision of our leaders to launch the African Union and other initiatives such as NEPAD and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation, hold so much promise for our continent. It is however vitally important that these historic initiatives are understood and supported by our people. Put differently, our people must have a sense of ownership.

I am happy to acknowledge publicly the leading role that President Obasanjo and his Government have played in advancing our Continental vision for greater unity and cohesion in this new and challenging millennium. Indeed, Nigeria has made ultimate sacrifices, in the resources of its nation and the blood of its people, to defending democratic governance in other countries. These sacrifices demonstrate the value it attaches to the ideal of democratic governance. It also goes without saying that to sustain the momentum that has been launched, Nigeria itself needs to continue to take steps to consolidate and strengthen its unity and national cohesion. Experience has shown us that a strong united and determined Nigeria can and has made a difference in the Region and in Africa, generally. It is satisfying to note that Nigeria has continued to make Africa, the centrepiece of its foreign policy. Above all we must acknowledge the fact that the destiny, the future and the greatness of this country of diversity lies in a peaceful, stable, secure and developed Africa.

As you prepare yourself to go towards your general elections, Africa and the whole world are watching you. Your successful accomplishment of this feat is Africa's success, because you will come out of it stronger.

Africa has faith in you, the people of Nigeria. The pride of this country and her people is, its being African, a character that has remained resilient. I am confident that you will overcome the democratic challenges, despite its complexity.

I thank you.