



ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY  
GENERAL OF THE OAU, TO THE FIFTH ORDINARY  
SESSION OF THE CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE OAU  
MECHANISM FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION,  
MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION  
LOME, TOGO, 17-19 MAY 2001**

*18 May 2001*

I wish to join our host and Current Chairman of our Organization, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, in extending a very warm welcome to all the Leaders and Delegations attending this Fifth Ordinary Session of the Central Organ at the level of Heads of State and Government. We are particularly delighted to be back in this City of Lome and to the traditionally warm and hospitable welcome of the people of Togo. We are all too conscious of the tremendous efforts that our Current Chairman had made with determination to ensure that this Summit takes place. We salute him for those efforts and pay tribute to him and his Government for the commitment that has been manifested in the efforts to find solutions to the many problems that continue to bleed our people, destroy our resources and tarnish the image of our Continent.

I should also like to pay tribute to the Leaders who are attending this Central Organ Summit. I recall that it was only a few weeks ago that our Leaders gathered together in Abuja, Nigeria, to address one of the greatest threats to our Continent's future well-being, the challenge of HIV/AIDS. Today, you are gathered here again in Lome, Togo, all as part of our collective efforts to find solutions to other equally pressing problems that confront our common African family.

In spite of the cynicism that has sometimes greeted the efforts of our Leaders and peoples, it is absolutely clear that no longer can Africans and their Leaders be accused of not assuming their responsibility to find solutions to African problems. The determination and courage to bring to an end the many crises that have undermined peace and development in the Continent bear testimony to the commitment of our countries and our continental Organization to build a better future for the African people. Indeed, the challenge posed by conflicts in our Continent is so daunting that no effort should be spared and no opportunity missed to address this plight.

The convening of this Summit is timely. It is a unique opportunity for the highest decision-making body of the Central Organ to assess and support the progress made so far, identify the difficulties to be overcome, and work out appropriate strategies that will enable us, individually and collectively, to influence the course of events and to advance the cause of peace, security and stability in Africa.

As the Secretary General of our continental Organization, I have been encouraged by the significant progress that has been achieved in

the search for solutions to some of the crises affecting the Continent. This applies particularly to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, where, despite the difficulties encountered, the two Parties have endeavoured, with the assistance of the United Nations and the OAU, to implement the Agreements they concluded in Algiers in June and December 2000. In the Republic of Congo, as the Foreign Minister will confirm to you later, during this Summit, the conclusion of National Dialogue, in which the OAU was represented, augurs well for the restoration of stability and lasting peace after a destabilizing and particularly destructive civil war.

In the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, in spite of difficulties and delays in the implementation of the Agreement signed in February 2001, the Parties seem committed to addressing the dual separatist and constitutional crises facing the Archipelago and restoring lasting stability in their country. After the recent consultations in Pretoria, South Africa, we remain hopeful that our efforts will be crowned with success sooner than later. The Summit will be further briefed by the Foreign Minister of South Africa.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo the positive disposition being demonstrated by all the Parties towards implementing the Lusaka Peace Agreement provides great hope for the ending of that devastating conflict. Similarly, in Sierra Leone there are encouraging outcomes from the efforts being deployed by ECOWAS, the United Nations and Parties to the conflict. We also remain hopeful that in the aftermath of the successful Arta Conference and the establishment of the Transitional Government, vigorous efforts will be pursued with the objective of bringing about peace and national reconciliation in Somalia.

In spite of this positive assessment, it remains a reality that in many of the situations I have highlighted, there is still a long way to go before the achievement of national reconciliation and the restoration of peace, security and stability. In effect, the road ahead contains obstacles and challenges which make it imperative for the Parties to continue to show the same level of commitment that had made possible the results achieved so far. But there is a lesson to be learnt from all these experiences which is that peace is always within our reach for as long as the Parties place the interests of their peoples above all other considerations and muster the necessary political will to overcome personal, group or institutional differences.

The bad news that we must come to terms with, is that alongside these positive developments, have coexisted other tragic situations which continue to undermine our quest for peace and reconciliation. I have in mind particularly, the very unfortunate situation in the Sudan, where the oldest conflict in our Continent has been raging and whose human and material toll are clearly intolerable and unsustainable. I sincerely hope that the Agreement reached earlier this month for the restoration of diplomatic relations between Sudan and Uganda will assist in contributing to the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the sub-region. Equally distressing is the conflict in Angola, where UNITA in spite of all efforts, admonitions, sanctions and pressures remain intransigent and is yet to make the strategic choice for peace.

At the same time, despite the progress achieved in the peace process in the DRC, the situation in the Great Lakes Region, and particularly in Burundi remains very disturbing. Similarly, the potential for a further deterioration of the crisis in the Mano River Basin generates grave concern for all of us.

**Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is therefore appropriate that the Agenda of this Summit focuses on the situations in the Great Lakes region and in the Sub-region of the Mano River Basin. These are conflicts with undeniable regional dimensions and whose destabilizing consequences cannot be over-emphasized.

A careful consideration of these situations, highlight mixed and contrasting developments. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the disposition towards a peaceful end to the conflict shown by President Joseph Kabila and the subsequent commitments made by the Parties to the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, have breathed new life and brought a fresh impetus to the peace process. It behoves the Central Organ to encourage this development and urge the Parties to comply with the letter and spirit of the Lusaka Agreement and, among other things to cooperate fully with the United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC) and the Joint Military Commission (JMC).

The Central Organ should also reaffirm the importance of an early commencement of the National Dialogue for a new dispensation in the

DRC. In this regard, the need for the Congolese Parties to cooperate fully with the Facilitator of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, Sir Ketumile Masire, must be underscored. I wish to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to Sir Ketumile who is here with us and to express the hope that his insights on the task and challenge that lie ahead, will enrich the deliberations of this esteemed Summit.

There is today, clearly a real opportunity to put an end to the unfortunate conflict in the DRC and to restore its unity and territorial integrity and to end the suffering and destruction in that country. It is my fervent hope that Congolese of all political persuasions, will spare their country the trauma of war and engage in fruitful dialogue to establish a new democratic political dispensation in their country, as well as address the security problem along the DRC borders with its neighbours. The DRC, a country with so much resources and potentials, must be assisted to overcome the problems that have kept it in turmoil, so that it can live at peace with itself, and with its neighbours and make a positive contribution to the ongoing efforts to build a united, peaceful and prosperous Continent. In this connection, the full respect of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of that country cannot be over-emphasized.

The international community cannot afford to miss this opportunity. While expressing satisfaction at the initiatives taken by the Security Council, including the ongoing visit of a delegation to the region, the Central Organ should strongly assert the need for the Security Council to fully assume its full responsibilities by deploying an appropriate level of peace-keeping forces in the DRC.

If the situation in the DRC gives us cause to be optimistic, the situation in Burundi remains deeply worrisome. As we meet here in Lome, today, nine months have elapsed since the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement. This Session of the Central Organ, must address the fact that the ongoing intensification of military action by the armed rebellion in Burundi and the lack of Agreement on who should lead the transition, have led to an impasse in the Arusha peace process. The perception that Burundi and its People are today on the verge of a disaster of great magnitude should not be dismissed lightly. Africa, particularly the Central Organ, has the duty and obligation to do everything to prevent the occurrence of another catastrophe in Burundi.

The Central Organ should send a strong message to the armed groups that it is now time for them to put an end to their unacceptable actions, which effect has been to expose the civilian population to untold hardship, suffering and unnecessary deaths, but also to undermine the Arusha peace process. At the same time, the Central Organ should encourage the Government of Burundi to continue to cooperate with the initiative of the Facilitator and the Vice President of South Africa, to negotiate a cessation of hostilities Agreement with the Armed Groups. We also need to stress to the Burundi Leadership that the time has come to put an end to its squabbling and agree on the leadership of the transition on the basis of the recommendations made by the 14<sup>th</sup> Regional Summit held in Arusha on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2001. The peace process in Burundi has been long and arduous. Its toll on the people of Burundi has been enormous. As the Facilitator of the Process, Madiba Nelson Mandela has consistently pointed out, the patience and resources of the international community is not limitless. The time to end the conflict is now.

**Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The peace process in Sierra Leone has in recent times made some significant progress. This is evidenced by the positive outcome of the second meeting of the Committee of Six of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council, the United Nations, the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF on advancing the peace process in Sierra Leone held in Abuja on 2 May 2001 and that of the Joint Committee held in Freetown on 15 May 2001. The developments that are unfolding in Sierra Leone must be encouraged, even while we must remain vigilant given past experiences.

The positive development in Sierra Leone notwithstanding, the crisis among the countries of the Mano River Union is of major concern to all of us. The border situation remains volatile and the armed confrontations have the potential of creating turmoil in the entire Mano River Basin and exacerbating an already serious humanitarian crisis. Unfortunately, despite the various initiatives launched by the Leaders of ECOWAS, there has been no significant progress in the efforts to end the crisis. The net effect is that today, the Region is confronted with a crisis that has far-reaching implications for peace and stability in West Africa.

Against this background, the Central Organ, while reaffirming its firm support for the efforts of ECOWAS and its Leaders, must launch a strong appeal to the countries concerned to resolve all outstanding differences peacefully and through dialogue.

In dealing with all these problems, it is important for us not to lose sight of the heavy unbearable and unsustainable costs that conflicts continue to impose on our continent and peoples as well as human tragedies that are unfolding before our eyes. Clearly, we have a moral and political responsibility to continue to address these problems, as you have been doing, with a view to resolving them definitively.

In a few days time, the Constitutive Act of the African Union will enter into force. This will mark a new era in our Continent's march towards unity and solidarity. Against this background, it is imperative that we overcome the fratricidal and bloody conflicts that have continued to divide our people and tear the social fabrics of our societies apart. We need to devote our meager resources to the cause of social and economic development and empowerment of our peoples and our Continent.

**Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa and Africans yearn for peace. The immense suffering and anguish of our populations must be ended. Our faith and solidarity with and between our countries must be given concrete expressions of realism. This Summit should enable us to further the cause of peace and progress on our Continent and thus lay the ground for the most propitious conditions for the Summit of all our leaders in Lusaka next July.

I thank you.