Organization of African Unity

Statement by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of the OAU at the First Annual African Governance Forum

Africa Hall
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

July 11, 1997

- Co-Chairpersons,

- Hon. Ato Dawit Yohannes,
  Speaker of the House of the
  People's Representatives of the
  Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

- Mr. Speth,
  UNDP Administrator,

- Hon. Kwassi Klutse,
  Prime Minister of Togo,

- Excellencies,

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be amongst you to take part in this First Annual African Governance Forum. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. K.Y. Amoako, ECA Executive Secretary and Mr. James Gustave Speth, UNDP Administrator, Co-Chairpersons of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiatives on Africa, for jointly organizing this Forum and for inviting me to address this opening session.

Indeed, I am pleased to attend a meeting devoted to an issue which is crucial to our Continent and which constitutes one of the priority concerns to our Organization.

As far back as in 1990, the Twenty-sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU adopted the *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation*. In adopting the Charter, the African leaders recognized the imperative need of situating the people at the Centre of Africa's development and transformation process and recognized the imperative need to put in place or strengthen measures intended to support and sustain efforts towards the building of good governance in Africa. It was clearly recognized that the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and in designing policies and programmes would effectively contribute to the development process in which the people as a whole, in a given society, share equitably the public good.

In this context, the Charter called for an opening up of political process to accommodate freedom of opinions, tolerate differences, accept consensus on issues as well as ensure the effective participation of the people and their Organizations and Associations.

More significantly, in the same year, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the *Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa* and the *Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World* which was a landmark document on the new vision, role and

position of the OAU in the new international context. Indeed, for the first time in the history of our Organization, African leaders addressed themselves to the issues of democratization and good governance in a candid and profound manner. They critically reviewed the situation on the Continent and came out with far reaching conclusions which set up the new agenda for our Continent and its Organization.

In their Declaration, the African leaders recommitted themselves to the further democratization of African societies and to the consolidation of democratic institutions in the Continent. In doing so they were fully aware that in order to facilitate the process of socio-economic transformation and integration, it was necessary to promote popular participation of our peoples in the processes of government and development. They were also aware that a political environment which guarantees human rights and the observance of the rule of law, would assure high standards of probity and accountability particularly on the part of those who hold public office.

I thought I should start by recalling that the issue of democratization and good governance has been on OAU's agenda for the last seven years. Since then, we have endeavoured to promote these objectives within the limits of our resources and capacity. In this regard, we have been encouraged by the growing positive disposition demonstrated by our Member States towards the attainment of our common goals.

In this endeavour, we, at the OAU, have been working on the assumption that while the fundamental principles of democracy and good governance are universal, their application vary from country to country. On this understanding, our African countries are entitled to determine, the application of democratic government on the basis of their socio-cultural values, taking into account their specific realities. Indeed, the dimension of cultural values and historical experiences are relevant in the application and consideration of democracy in our societies. Africans as much as other peoples aspire for liberty, human dignity, equity and socio-economic progress. But. while there are universal values which are the common heritage of humanity, there are no ready made recipes for democracy and governance. Each society should generate its home grown modalities for forging ahead in democracy and good governance on the basis of universally recognized principles.

Governance is the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country's affairs comprising of the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences. In this regard, it is important to promote and support dialogue between and among all groups, be they ethnic, religious, or regional. This is a prerequisite for building democracy and good governance particularly in our African countries which are characterized by their ethnic and cultural diversities.

We, at the OAU, share the view that the search for a more comprehensive system of governance which recognizes the legitimate concerns of all in a given society and which guarantee security and stability for all may contribute substantially in the efforts to prevent conflicts in the Continent. That is why we have been encouraging politics of inclusion rather than exclusion. Democratic governance is, indeed incompatible with the politics of intolerance and exclusion. Good governance is based on accommodation and tolerance.

In building good governance, we also need to address some misconceptions of democracy within and outside the Continent. Democracy has often been understood as the participation of the people in electing a government of their choice through ballot boxes.

The elections are, indeed, a crucial stage in a democratic process. This is why the OAU has participated in the observation of over 60 elections in our Member States. But, while elections are necessary they, by themselves do not provide sufficient condition for the building of democracy and good governance. Elections *per se* are not the panacea for democracy and good governance. In other words, the existence of political parties, the conduct of free and fair elections and the performance of Parliament under the leadership of an elected government do not always turn governance into a democratic system.

Beyond the electoral process which is crucial, we need to build institutions to sustain democracy and promote good governance. In this respect, we need to address, as a matter of urgency, specific factors related to the building of Governance in Africa. The first is the need to strengthen the quality of leadership so as to ensure the promotion of people centred decision-making process. This, of course, calls for greater transparency in decision-making as well as accountability. Our leaders must continue to place national interest before self or group interest. Power must not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means to promote the wider interests of the people. But, more critically, power must be vested in the people and not in their leaders. We should remember the famous tenet according to which power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In this regard, power sharing and all inclusive political and socio-economic processes provide a strong foundation for good governance.

The second factor relates to sound management of economies. It is clear that our economies are still too weak to meet all the demands and aspirations of the African peoples. This is all the more necessary to put in place sound management policies to ensure that the limited resources are managed with equity and efficiency.

But, unfortunately, lack of sound management of our economies has accelerated capital flight, encouraged corruption and brain-drain and contributed to increase poverty in our Continent. We should, therefore, commit ourselves to strengthen the management and control systems in our countries and to vigorously fight the corruption phenomenon which is undermining the collective efforts of our peoples and threatening to destroy the very fabric of some of our societies.

Thirdly, a strong judicial system clearly provides the necessary framework and strong foundation for good governance. Such a system, representing one of the major democratic institutions, needs to be strengthened to function more directly and effectively towards promoting good governance. We need to build in our countries independent, efficient and strong judiciary systems which can guarantee the respect of the law and render justice in accordance to the law. Clearly, one of the fundamental prerequisites for such a reliable and dependable judiciary is its incorruptibility.

Fourthly, an independent and responsible media should emerge as a strong institution and assume the functions of a watch-dog interfacing between the Government and the people. The Media should be on the forefront and make special effort to champion the cause of popular participation and indeed, provide access for the dissemination of information

and education programmes on democracy and governance. It should be involved as a partner in the building of democracy and good governance. In this regard, the adoption of information codes defining the role responsibility, the rights and obligations of the media should be encouraged in our countries. Similarly, administrative measures against media should be avoided.

Good governance also requires high standards of integrity and efficiency in the civil service. A civil service that is over-staffed, under-qualified, corrupt, ethnically composed, will not be able to optimally play the role of promoting democracy and good governance. Moreover, a political civil service, or a "one-dimension" civil service undermines efforts towards building democracy and good governance. The civil service should be at the service of the general public and interest and conduct itself with impeccable integrity.

In conclusion, I wish to underline the importance and keen interest that, we, at the OAU, attach to the promotion of good governance in our Continent. Africa is clearly committed to promoting democracy good governance and the rule of law. It has the determination but it has not all the required resources. What we need therefore to promote is a global partnership to enhance good governance on our Continent. Our Continent as a partner within the international community wants to play its rightful

role in accordance with universally acceptable standards. I therefore hope that this present meeting will constitute yet another forum to forge such a partnership together.