

THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION



ADDRESS

BY

**DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
CHAIRMAN OF THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION**

**“FROM THE OAU TO THE AFRICAN UNION:
CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE”**

**TO THE
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**“FROM THE OAU TO THE AFRICAN UNION:
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CHAIRMAN MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION**

Chairperson,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and privilege for me, to be given an opportunity of delivering the Mary Kingsley Zochonis Lecture for 2003 on the occasion of the annual general meeting of the Royal African Society.

For many decades, the Society has keenly followed developments in our Continent, and through its various initiatives contributed to a broader understanding of our situation. I wish to pay tribute to all concerned for this laudable work. As someone who has been privileged to engage directly with the challenges confronting the African Continent, first as my country's Permanent Representative at the United Nations and later as the Secretary General of the Continental body – the Organization of African Unity – for 12 years, I do cherish the value of promoting greater mutual understanding.

The history of our two Continents – Africa and Europe – is so much connected that our destinies are bound to be intertwined-whether we like it or not. There is a lot that we have in common, in terms of institutional culture, economic linkages, and social relations that it becomes important that we understand our respective trajectories, particularly in this new century and new millennium. We are reaching an important cross-roads as people of the world, and it is critical that we harness our diversities and use them as a source of strength. Fora, such as this one, organized by an eminent institution like yours, do play an important role in fostering that understanding.

I have been requested to reflect on the role of the Organization of African Unity and its transformation to the African Union. I do hope that my reflections will be a basis for a future fruitful exchange. I must at the same time point out that due to time constraints, I will of necessity be making passing references only to some key developments and issues.

The idea of a united Africa has pre-occupied Pan Africanists both those within the continent and in the Diaspora for many decades. Indeed we are still celebrating one hundred years of Pan Africanism. It should be recalled that the first International Conference aimed at promoting Pan-Africanism was held in London in 1900. It should also be recalled that the Fifth Conference was held in Manchester. Various initiatives have been taken with a view to the realization of this objective. Indeed the Pan Africanist Movement provided the momentum, which resulted in contacts, and consultations, which eventually led to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity in May 1963 in Addis Ababa.

It is relevant to recall that prior to the holding of the OAU founding Summit in 1963 at the invitation of OAU Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie, the then independent African states were divided in different groups such as the Casablanca Group, the Monrovia Group and the Brazzaville Group.

All these had their own perspectives on the way forward and on the approach towards unity and on how to face the challenges ahead. Furthermore, even at the formation of the OAU in Addis Ababa, the differences of approach were manifest between those who wanted a more revolutionary process towards Continental unity like President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and those who were more cautious and guarded in approach. Indeed, the debate on what type of Unity our Continent should aspire for continued and was also manifest at the Cairo Summit during the First Ordinary Session of the organization in 1964.

Yet, throughout these debates, one thing remained clear. No one group, nation, or individual leader, at any point in the evolution of this process, doubted the fundamental need for Africans to pursue their destiny collectively. The different voices were motivated by a collective desire for a better future and inspired by the determination of generations of Africans to regain their dignity and self-determination.

It is in this respect, that the idea of unity, since the foundation of the OAU has represented a resolve to pursue a vision of the future. It has embodied a bond of fraternity and solidarity among all the people of our Continent. It has constituted a vehicle for articulation and action.

In the OAU Charter, the Founding Fathers articulated a clear vision of the destiny of the continent – a vision that has stood the test of time. A major emphasis is placed on promoting unity, solidarity and cooperation among the African people and states. Indeed the OAU Charter is very explicit in underlining the totality of unity – encompassing economic, social, political and overall developmental dimensions.

The Organization of African Unity has served the Continent for 39 years, carrying it through some of the arduous challenges of the second half of the past century. It concretized the idea of Pan-Africanism and provided a vehicle for realizing a collective vision and aspirations of the African People. The mere fact that it sustained

itself for four decades, demonstrates the tenacity of Africans. After so many centuries of subjugation, humiliation and of being divided through the twin historical evils of slavery and colonialism they remained determined, resilient and adamant in their quest for carving a destiny of unity and solidarity. Indeed, the OAU achieved outstanding accomplishments in the political, economic and social realms. At the same time, it has also revealed shortcomings.

Quite remarkably, the Organization survived the challenges of the past four decades. Established during the period of the Cold War, the Organization survived the vagaries and challenges of that era. All the 30 Member States who attended the founding conference on 25th May 1963, and the others who joined the Organization later, have remained faithful and committed to its creed and vision. Only the Kingdom of Morocco opted to remove itself from the Organization on a difference of principle.

During this period the Continent has gone through formidable trials and tribulations, ranging from severe economic crisis and

marginalization, rampant conflicts and the attendant instability and insecurity, to the decimation of its people by the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Despite all these, the OAU remained intact and succeeded in moving to a higher horizon. It gave us a means of galvanizing our collective interests and pursuing common aspirations.

Similarly, notwithstanding our diversity, an element that is sometimes artificially accentuated, the OAU managed to promote and inculcate an African identity in all of us. To a substantial degree it inculcated into us a sense of transcending our respective nationalities, cultural diversities, variation in languages, and physical differences. It kept on reminding us that the bottom line is that we are all Africans, bonded by a shared destiny.

In 1963, Africa had only 32 countries that were politically independent. The rest were still under the tutelage of colonialism and apartheid, some of which was the most vicious that modern history has witnessed. From the very beginning, both independent Africa and national liberation movements were committed to the liberation

struggle. Even when attempts were made to divide North Africa from the rest of Africa, Egypt championed the liberation struggle while the rest of Africa supported the Algerian struggle. And when Algeria became independent it positioned itself in the forefront in support of the liberation of the entire continent.

It was under the framework of the OAU that independent Africa was mobilized to obliterate the last vestiges of colonialism and apartheid and to usher-in a new independent Africa. This was done through concerted action in support of the freedom and liberation struggles at various levels. Political and diplomatic support was mobilized at the United Nations and other Forums. European and international public opinion for example was mobilized. Here in the United Kingdom the support of the anti-apartheid movement and other support groups was of considerable importance. Meanwhile, the OAU Liberation Committee based in Dar es Salaam helped to coordinate the practical support and assistance to the liberation movements.

With the accomplishment of that historic mission, the OAU, working with other Regional Organizations such as the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank embarked on a reorientation of the Continental agenda towards the socio-economic development of the people of our Continent. The laying down of the principles for cooperation in the social and economic field, and specifically the creation of Regional Economic Communities and the signing of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community signify OAU's endeavor in surmounting the new challenges facing the Continent.

By the 1990s, after years of being anguished and standing indicted by the horror of escalating conflicts in our Continent, Africa, under the OAU, responded by collectively insisting that it was unacceptable for us to be perceived as a Continent prone to endemic violence, and where peace, security, stability and development were but a distant possibility. It was conceded from that point on, that peace, security, and stability were a collective responsibility of all

Africans. It cannot be left to the idiosyncrasies of individual societies, in the name of national sovereignty.

The creation of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in 1993 was thus an important achievement in our quest to ensure the well being of our people. It is encouraging to observe that Africans themselves are leading all the initiatives that are currently being undertaken to resolve conflicts in Africa. And as we enter the new century, despite various hurdles to overcome, there are positive developments in many of these conflict areas that signal prospects for peace.

I need to mention also that the OAU has seen the steady but definite contribution in the inculcation and strengthening of the culture of democracy and the respect of human rights. The rejection of unconstitutional changes of Government, the willingness of Member States to have their elections monitored, as well as the reproaches often made on violations of human rights are some of the gradual steps being taken to institutionalize these values.

Let me now turn to the transformation of the OAU to the African Union: Here, it is important to stress at the very outset that this transformation is not simply a process of institutional change. It is true that for the past 3 years, a lot of the efforts in Addis Ababa have been directed at preparing, signing and ratifying the legal instrument establishing the Union, launching the key Organs, establishing the Commission, and electing Members of the Commission. However, this represents the groundwork.

Indeed, if for whatever reason, the objective was only to reconfigure structures, there would have been no need for embarking on such a complicated process. In fact, there would have been no need even to change the original name. After all, the people of Africa are so attached to the OAU name that new efforts are now required to reorient them to the new designation of the African Union.

The transformation we are addressing this evening is much deeper and more profound. It refers to galvanizing the desires, the

aspirations, the endeavors of the African people in order to realize the vision of their collective destiny. The essential attribute of this change is the unraveling of a new dispensation in the Continent, higher in its horizon, vigorous in its momentum, endeavouring to alter social, economic and political relations within Africa, and between Africa and the rest of the world.

The event that took place in Durban on 9th July 2002, when the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government formally launched the African Union, was a major milestone for African people. The fact that it was the same African leaders, who often are considered protective of their national sovereignty and averse to serious integration initiatives who, in less than 3 years, could bring to reality such a profound idea, was a remarkable achievement. Indeed, in less than 3 years, serious issues concerning the nature and scope of African unity, roles and responsibilities, structural implications and resource imperatives, were raised, negotiated, and in some cases resolved and agreed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and collective determination.

The important question, at this juncture, is – in what ways does the African Union enhance the achievements of the OAU. In this regard, I believe it does so in many ways. In the first place, it eliminates the separation between the OAU as established by the Charter of 1963, and the African Economic Community that was established by the Abuja Treaty of 1991. The existence of this superfluous institutional distinction tended to perpetuate the disconnection between the political and economic programmes of the Continental agenda. The Constitutive Act, together with the initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) forge a synchronized strategic orientation thus pooling all resources together and provide for a concerted action.

It is in this regard that the African Union broadens the scope of integration even though it allows for the maintenance of inherited boundaries and the sovereignty of individual Member States. The provision for the establishment of financial institutions and the allowance for the Union to intervene in Member States in some

circumstances have introduced a progressive dimension to Continental relations transcending the disparate national spheres of authority in critical domains. This is significant. For a long time the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states which had its own legitimate rationale was abused by some states which at times violated human rights with impunity without any fear or concern of reproach. Gradually this has changed with the OAU as a collective expected to have a say in what happens in different states. The Constitutive Act of the African Union has effectively strengthened the aspect of collective concern and responsibility and with it the option of collective action where and when necessary.

Similarly, the incorporation into the Constitutive Act of important elements such as peace, security and stability; democratization; human rights; rule of law, promotion of gender equality, science and technology, revitalizes the Continental agenda and broadens the space of integration. This dynamism is further reinforced by an enhanced institutional framework that provides for

17 Organs. Such a structure not only permits a broader participation of stakeholders but it also engenders more operational effectiveness.

Indeed, the African Union reinvigorates the agenda of Pan-Africanism by putting the people, rather than simply states and structures, to be at the centre of the integration process. Once again, the task of fostering unity is re-anchored in the everyday activities of the African people in the public, civic and private domains.

The African Union, in this respect, is neither a completely new Organization nor is it simply a change of name and designation. It builds from the accomplishments of the OAU and creates an elevated, dynamic and engaging framework for fostering closer unity and solidarity among the African people.

It launches the Continental body into a high operational gear through the consolidation of Regional Economic Communities and also launching activity oriented programmes such as the New

Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the Conference on Security, Stability, and Development Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA).

The new framework accentuates the Continental space *vis-à-vis* the national space. The competence of the African Union is much broader and the institutional structures that have been provided for – establish a dynamic framework for providing vision, leadership and decision-making; for ensuring technical oversight and guidance; and for maintaining effective engagement and implementation in all spheres of the Continent's development.

And more importantly, the African Union brings to the fore the role of the people of this Continent in the shaping of their destiny. The provision for the Pan-African Parliament; as well as the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council in the Constitutive Act, when they are fully operationalized, is intended to enhance the voice of the people in the affairs of the Union.

At this juncture, African states are at the formative stage of this laudable enterprise. The commitment is high and the determination is strong. However, we have also to be cognizant of the challenges facing the continent in realizing this noble aspiration. Indeed, the most critical is the anchoring of the whole project within the initiatives and everyday activities and interests of the African people.

The African Union is not simply an undertaking of Heads of State and Government. Neither is it a responsibility of the OAU Secretariat or those of the Regional Economic Communities. The project involves all of us as a collective – whether it is the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture; the Confederation of Labors; Farmers Cooperatives; Youth, Women and Intellectual Organizations – all of us are stakeholders in this undertaking, and therefore we need to take ownership and engage ourselves in strategies of promoting closer interaction for our common good.

Perhaps some of you may wonder as to what is the basis of this optimism about African unity when the Continent is embroiled in so

many social, political and economic problems. Do the prerequisites for unity exist in Africa? If they do not, is it really feasible to pursue a two-track process, of creating the conditions for unity and promoting unity at the same time? The African experience, in my view, demonstrates that one can respond in the affirmative with regard to the critical importance of conditions which nurture unity and the fact that some of these conditions are lacking in the African Continent. However, it is possible to create and consolidate these conditions while at the same time, seek closer unity. It should not be necessarily a sequential process.

It is true that Africa is still ravaged by conflicts, poverty and weak political institutions. It is equally true that the communication networks are still externally oriented and social identities remain narrower. Nevertheless, the various initiatives taken to overcome these constraints have reaffirmed that only through united action can these obstacles be surmounted. African people have to achieve unity both as a way of realizing their full existence as a people, and more immediately, as means of overcoming their impediments. Indeed, the

full potential of an individual African, and individual nation cannot be harnessed within the confines of the locality and or separate boundaries. It requires the maximum breath of the Continent's ensemble of resources, institutions and traditions for any African to be a full African.

In the same regard, it has become quite evident lately that each region of the world is so much preoccupied with its own affairs that it is imprudent to rely on others in solving problems. While paying tribute to Britain's response to the plight of the people of Sierra Leone, it has not been easy to involve our Western partners in active peace keeping in our Continent. Similarly, the recent global discussions from Doha to Monterrey to Kananaskis and the pledges for financing African development are a sober reminder that global partnership is not as amiable as the rhetoric sounds. It is only through pulling the Continent collective efforts that a strong basis can be established. Unity is the only rational option for Africa.

Having said that however, it is important to recognize that the reinvigorated quest for unity, as symbolized by the decision to establish the African Union, coincides with the intensification of the process of globalization, which also has a propensity to generate strong centripetal tendencies. Dispersed linkages are fostered across the world, in a clustered fashion, driven mainly by the interests of multinational corporations as well as those of state hegemonic powers through multilateral arrangements. Seemingly these linkages may appear to promote integration – just as colonialism could be described in that way. However, in many incidences, the clusters formed through this process, often organized around specific commodities, conditions for market access, systems of accumulation, or even security arrangements, do not correspond to the Regional Integration Arrangements created by Africans. Neither the basis of their formation nor the forces that propel their functioning correspond with the vision of realizing a self-sustaining African Unity.

In this respect, while Africa cannot but endeavor to position itself and maximize the benefits of globalization, vigorous pursuit is

needed in overcoming the fragmentation fostered by this global force. Despite the diversity and differences within the Continent, the African Union is a holistic endeavor incorporating all the 53 Member States. While the building blocs remain the Regional Economic Communities whose development is synchronized within the Union's strategic programme, the fragmented clusters set up through the globalization process present a hindrance to effective African integration.

A more profound challenge of African Union relates to the involvement of the people. In the OAU's 39 years of existence, the people have fully identified with its vision and mission. In the past four decades of my diplomatic career I have had the privilege of traveling across the Continent meeting with ordinary Africans from all walks of life. A consistent message I received from all of them was that the Continental body had to be more engaging in all the domains of Africa's development. The people were expecting more from the OAU in promoting their interaction and in addressing their

every day problems. They considered the Continental Organization to be a legitimate actor in their daily existence.

The popular connection and identity with the OAU is a precious asset that needs to be preserved and consolidated. It is what sustained the Organization when the Member States and the Continent as a whole were threatened by all sorts of divisive forces undermining peace, security and stability.

The architects of the African Union have recognized the paramount importance of this factor right at the inception of the Organization. Embedded within the structures of the Union is a strong component of people's participation, through their representatives in the Pan-African Parliament and through their civic organizations in the Economic, Social and Cultural Council. Furthermore, the role of the people has been given prominence in the pronouncements of African leaders on the African Union and in the various details issued by the Commission of the AU. A major challenge is how to operationalize this cardinal principle and to

ensure that the people are effectively engaged in the integration process. The initial institutional launches have not included the people's Organs such as the Pan-African Parliament and the ECOSOC. However, it is expected that the framework for launching the latter will be considered at the next AU Summit in Maputo next July, and that sufficient signatures and number of ratifications will be obtained in the near future to allow for the entry into force of the protocol establishing the parliament.

In all these matters, leadership plays a critical role. For the project of African unity to recapture its popular base, African leadership has to rekindle the Pan-African spirit. In each and every African citizen and leader, a total and unqualified commitment to African unity has to be inculcated. Continental interests have to supersede short term national concerns. Selflessness, statesmanship and larger vision have to be the hallmarks of leadership.

It is such a leadership that can give a progressive interpretation to the Constitutive Act which, on the one hand, reaffirms the

principle of respecting borders existing on achievement of independence and the principle of non-interference by any Member States in the internal affairs of another, and on the other hand, provides for the establishment of supranational financial institutions, and allows for the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

With all those commitments and determination, the structures for African Unity cannot be put in place without adequate resources. The NEPAD secretariat had earlier computed that close to US\$64 billion, in various forms, is needed annually to maintain a growth rate of 7% for the Continent and to provide a strong basis for poverty eradication and good governance. I believe that the Commission of the African Union may also come up with a substantial resource requirements for operationalizing the 17 Organs provided for in the Constitutive Act and for running the requisite Union programmes.

It is not easy to mobilize such resources, both externally and more so internally. The recent experience of financing African development has not been encouraging. More creativity and resourcefulness is needed on how to advance African Unity without being impeded by the financial crunch. Africa has to rely more on its human, institutional, and natural resources for realizing its vision. However, the rest of the world, particularly the developed world has to realize that the misery of Africa engenders suffering not for the African people alone. It does impact on human development as a whole.

The notion of the global village that is now in currency, derives from African traditions. In its indigenous sense, a village is not simply a small human settlement. Rather, it is a social organism, characterized by fraternity and collective concern. No one part of a true village can be allowed to languish in misery while the other part basks in affluence. The global village should not lose this cardinal principle of its primogenitor. The quest for African unity needs to be

complemented by earnest efforts to streamline global relations so that inclusiveness is enhanced.

Finally, with reference to challenges; all these confronting Africa right now are not insurmountable. Despite the emerging divergent contours, global trends at this conjuncture tend to favour closer linkages and the formation of larger units. Africa should take this advantage of globalization and steer it towards realizing the people's vision of establishing an effective African Union. After all, there is no other rational choice for the people of our Continent except to enhance our integration.

I thank you!