

GLOBAL NGO FORUM ON BUILDING SUSTAINABLE
SOCIETIES: THE ROLE OF NGOS IN EMERGENCIES
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Keynote Address

by

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Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity
on "The Crisis and Opportunity for Peace - an OAU Perspective"

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Layashi Yaker, UN Under-Secretary-General
and Executive Secretary of ECA,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to join the Prime Minister of the Transitional government of Ethiopia, His Excellency, Ato Tamrat Layne, and the Executive Secretary of ECA, Mr. Layashi Yaker, who addressed you a while ago, in welcoming you all to Addis Ababa and wishing your Forum every success. Let me also, from the outset, express my deep appreciation to the organizers for convening this important Global Forum in Africa. The meaning and significance of bringing a global forum on building sustainable societies to Africa is not lost on any one of us.

I have been called upon to deliver a keynote address on "The Crisis and Opportunity for Peace." As Secretary General of the OAU, I will naturally endeavour to submit on this central issue of peace from an African perspective.

We, in Africa, need peace more than anything else as we have for so long suffered from the severe consequences of conflicts which have decimated our populations, divided our nations and undermined our efforts at development.

We are only too aware that persistent armed conflicts over the past three decades have constrained our economic development and have resulted in making us impoverished and marginalized. Excessive militarization and continuing conflicts have squandered valuable and scarce resources and caused unparalleled human disaster, staggering losses of human life, massive displacement of innocent people, largely children and women, and untold material destruction which Africa can ill afford. We have become chronically vulnerable and dependent on international assistance, not only for development, but also for the containment and solution of the conflicts many of which are of our own making. We cannot and must not allow our continent to be marred by protracted conflicts and destructive violence that rips apart the very fabric of our society.

. That is why we, in Africa, are henceforth determined to firmly address the conflicts raging on our Continent. Defying the doubts of many, the leaders and people of Africa are rising above their differences and trying to come to grips with the difficult reality of the region to resolve the prevailing conflicts in a coordinated and sustained manner. We are striving to give priority to the bonds that naturally draw us together - the culture, traditions, languages, trade routes and shared human values - over and above the forces that tore us apart in the past.

. The Organization of African Unity, on its part, is determined to address the prevailing conflicts in the region with renewed vigour and commitment. Gathering together here in Addis Ababa in an unprecedented Summit in July 1990, the African Heads of State and Government committed themselves to work towards the peaceful and speedy resolutions of conflicts in Africa. The Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Changes Taking Place in the World, which was adopted at the meeting, affirms that peace and stability are the final basic premises for lasting progress and creating an enabling environment for socio-economic development. Our leaders further undertook to redirect Africa's energies and focus

towards resolving and managing conflicts, the one issue which stands to undermine whatever else we wish to embark on.

It is in that regard that indepth reflection was initiated in recent years within the OAU on the need to equip our continental organization with a mechanism which would enable it to respond swiftly to conflict situations in our region. This exercise culminated in the historic decision adopted by our Leaders last year in Cairo to establish a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The Mechanism is built around a Central Organ comprising Member States and functioning at ambassadorial, ministerial and Heads of State levels as the situation warrants. The Mechanism relies on the Secretariat as its operational arm and on an OAU Peace Fund open for contribution from within and outside Africa to sustain its activities.

The Mechanism has been functioning since last September and has met several times at various levels - including at Summit level - to consider conflict situations in the Continent. It is in this respect that it has had to reflect on how best the OAU can assist in resolving conflicts such as those raging in Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique,

Rwanda and Burundi, as well as other situations with conflict potential in the Continent such as the more recent Cameroon/Nigeria dispute.

. With its limited resources, the OAU has strived to make a contribution to resolving conflicts on the Continent. Its efforts are often not adequately publicized and consequently not well known to the public. But they are there! I would like in that regard to refer for instance to the prolonged and sustained efforts made by the OAU in tandem with the countries of the region which culminated in the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement between the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front. The OAU is presently engaged in the peace and reconciliation process in Burundi where an OAU Mission is assisting the various parties in seeking a peaceful solution to the crisis in that country. The OAU is involved in the implementation process of the Rome Peace Accords between the Government of Mozambique and the RENAMO through my Special Representative who has been in Maputo for more than a year now. The Organization is equally involved and playing a significant role in seeking a solution to the Liberian

conflict. Through its Eminent Person, the former President of Zimbabwe, Prof. Canaan Banana, the OAU has been extending crucial assistance in support of the efforts of the ECOWAS countries and the UN.

This is neither the time nor the place to submit a detailed presentation of OAU's efforts at seeking a peaceful solution to the conflicts raging on our Continent. Suffice it to say that OAU's commitment is unwavering. Despite its resource limitations, the Organization will spare no effort in its attempts to work resolutely towards peace, security and stability on our Continent.

Also, realizing that talking of peace and stability in an atmosphere of poverty and deprivation is illusory and that development is a prerequisite for lasting peace, African countries have intensified their efforts to enhance economic cooperation and integration, which can propel the continent to new heights of growth and development. The Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community is a major and significant step in creating a mutually beneficial economic environment for cooperation in the management of the region's scarce resources. One of the fundamental lessons of the past

years, is that no nation in the region can go it alone and without a vision of regional cooperation and economic integration. It is doubtful that we can escape the cycle of endless poverty which has been our lot for long. The faithful and dynamic implementation of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community along with the establishment and effective functioning of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution form the pillars of our region's policy and OAU's priority in the 1990s and beyond.

Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

These actions represent a new beginning, an awakening of the continent to the need to seize the initiative and begin doing what must be done to right what has gone wrong for too long a time. The debilitating frequency with which conflicts rage and fail to be contained and the catastrophic consequences of these conflicts have provoked persistent questions as to our ability and willingness to address the insanity of never-ending conflicts. We have no choice but to defy the odds and operate in unity with the objective of applying ourselves in meeting the peace challenge, with the

same collective resolve and determination with which we mounted in the prosecution of the liberation struggle. We spoke with one voice, we acted together and we won. In this phase of the liberation of the Continent from the scourge of war and conflict, we must do likewise.

A complex and delicate experiment is underway in the region which holds out the possibility that, despite formidable challenges, a new political, security and economic order may eventually be realized. While the promise of this coming era is vibrant, it is also extremely fragile. Literally millions of lives and the prospects of lasting peace, and economic and social reconstruction are hanging in the balance. It is inconceivable that such initiatives will succeed without reciprocal commitment from the international community. Support of the international community is crucial for the establishment of durable peace and sustainable development and the efforts to achieve lasting solutions to the root causes of conflict and human suffering in the region, particularly at the time when the leaders and people of the region are struggling to seize the momentum of peaceful and democratic reform and are seeking to assert universal humanitarian principles as their own.

While we know that we have to reach to our own resources and prepare to make the necessary sacrifices to raise them, we fervently hope that our friends and partners will come forward with the needed financial resources and moral support. I therefore wish to reiterate my appeal to all friends of Africa, and the NGO community is no exception in this regard, to respond positively and make contributions to OAU's peace efforts, drawing on the good example of those who have already done or have pledged to do so, and to whom I wish to express my sincere appreciation.

Today, Africa stands at a particularly important historical juncture. Africa has relegated colonialism and apartheid to the final ignominy of history and is now striving to end conflicts and exchange the insanity of force and violence for peace and cooperation in the region. In an historic process of change, which I believe is neither stoppable nor reversible, an increasing numbers of African countries have made decided moves in the direction of the recognition of the rights of individuals and the need for political pluralism and representative governance. Despite tumultuous starts and stops in some countries, a major effort to reform systems of governance and to institute democratic,

accountable and transparent systems of rule is under way in the region. In South Africa, after years of struggle and sacrifice, we are currently witnessing the triumph of reason over bigotry and of right over injustice, and it my hope that the remaining weeks of political campaigning and April elections will proceed under conditions of greater national reconciliation and peace.

It is extremely gratifying to me to note that a myriad of institutions, including NGOs, women groups and others, are at the centre-stage of these movements and have been working diligently to strengthen the forces of freedom and further the causes of peace and stability. I have no doubt that without the selfless sacrifice and the painstaking initiatives of NGOs in support of the efforts of Governments, the frontiers of freedom and justice would not have stretched to cover every corner of our continent. It is imperative in this regard that we continue to work for peace and justice by ensuring respect for human rights, popular participation, equitable distribution of resource as well as the building and/or strengthening of democratic culture and tradition including the inculcation of the culture of tolerance in our societies.

Thank you for your kind attention, and I wish your deliberations every success.