

ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
OF THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY
HARARE, ZIMBABWE, 3 JUNE 1997**

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General, at the
Inaugural Session of the African
Economic Community**

- **Mr. President,**
- **Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,**
- **Honourable Ministers,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Distinguished Delegates,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The African Economic Community Treaty which was signed seven years ago, has been in force for three years now. After the OAU Charter, the AEC Treaty is yet another instrument which occupies a strategic place in the annals of African history. This Treaty translates a commitment of all our countries to the pursuit of intra-African cooperation and integration, as the indispensable strategy in the strive towards economic transformation, sustainable growth, poverty eradication and economic independence.

The African Economic Community is a reality; your present Assembly testifies to this fact; not as a symbolic demonstration of commitment to unity and solidarity, but in a conscious recognition of the imperatives and determination of building continental integration on which depends our survival as independent and sovereign entities. Over the years, we have adopted several declarations and resolutions, as well as decisions; and we now have the AEC Treaty. All these will not be very meaningful if not backed up with concrete actions, particularly at the national level, with the support and full participation of all segments of the society.

In this regard, it has to be recognized that the required action must, first and foremost be taken at the national level, because it is actions at the national level that will impact and propel regional integration effort. The formulation of national policies and programmes for economic and social development should systematically take into account sub-regional and regional dimensions, with the objective of promoting the integration process. It is also the responsibility

of our governments to set up such national and multinational institutions and mechanisms that will promote and encourage the full participation of the people in the integration process, through *inter alia* multi-sectoral meetings and consultations on programme formulation, implementation and monitoring.

An issue that needs to be addressed as a priority is the building and strengthening of institutional and infrastructural capacities in the Continent, in order to enable our countries face the challenges of accelerated development, and integration into the global economy. Attention has to be paid to the building of the requisite science and technology base, backed up with policies and strategies for the development and utilization of manpower resources, commensurate with the requirements of modern economic activities. Such policies must of necessity, emphasize the empowerment of the people, especially, the African private sector, including our women, to be full partners in the integration effort.

To this end, we have to mount a campaign on popularization of the AEC Treaty, and the treaties of the regional economic communities as well. These treaties, their basic provisions and implications for the ordinary people, in terms of benefits and opportunities have to be explained and discussed, to the understanding of the different components of the African society. The major challenge facing the African media is the creation of an environment which is favourable to change and development, particularly in terms of the requirements of the AEC Treaty and the treaties of the RECs. The African media have a duty to widen their coverage beyond purely national issues, to encompass issues of African economic integration in such a way as to kindle interest and arouse curiosity. The AEC issues must rank high on the national agenda in all African countries, and should feature in debates and discussions in parliaments and cabinets, as well as in board rooms. I have to stress that unless our governments provide the lead and create the enabling environment, the private sector will not be encouraged to commit resources to projects that promote and facilitate regional integration.

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Let me turn briefly to the critical issue of the regional economic communities which are recognized to constitute the pillars of the continental body. The AEC Treaty makes it very clear that the African Economic Community shall be established mainly through the harmonization, coordination and progressive integration of the activities of regional economic communities. This involves not only full knowledge by the AEC, of the programmes and activities of all RECs, but also full participation in the process of their elaboration, implementation and monitoring. Secondly, the process calls for coherence, consistency and complementarity of policies and actions, on the part of all Member States at various fora, the AEC, RECs and in organizations and fora outside the Continent.

The Council of Ministers has recommended for approval of this inaugural Assembly, the Protocol that should govern relations between the African Economic Community

and Regional Economic Communities, particularly with regard to the coordination, harmonization and gradual integration of activities and programmes of the RECs, in support of continental integration. I see it as a major responsibility of all Member States, within their respective regional communities, to follow-up and monitor the implementation of the Protocol, and to provide direction and guidance to the RECs, on the critical issue of programme coordination and harmonization.

On our part, in the Joint Secretariat and RECs, we are working together to ensure that our meetings are better streamlined, more focused and oriented to meeting the demands of Member States. We are also coordinating and pooling our resources and effort with regard to various initiatives, in order to respond to the challenges that our Continent is facing in the ever changing global economic environment.

Several calls have been made in this regard to the strengthening of the capacity of the Secretariat with the provision of more resources, both human and material, in order to enable it cope with the increased demand for its services.

- Mr. President,
- Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Today, Africa is marking yet a major milestone in its march to economic development on the basis of its long standing commitment to collective self-reliance. Today, we are taking a major step to translate the dreams and aspirations of our people for unity and progress, into reality. It is a major step in a long journey - a journey that we are committed to complete, following the road that the Abuja Treaty has charted for us. I realize that there will be problems and obstacles to overcome on the way, as well as deal with our detractors. Among these obstacles is the issue of making peace, security

and stability reign in our Continent so that all our efforts, intellectual capacities and resources are devoted to completing this journey of destiny in the shortest possible time.

Africa has come a long way. We have every reason to be proud of our achievements, particularly in the total liberation of our Continent. What remains now is the last hurdle that will demand our dedication and total commitment to programmes that we have adopted on economic and social development. Our Continent has sufficient intellectual resources which should be harnessed for the betterment of its citizens, provided that adequate policies and programmes are in place. Africa has to demonstrate more seriousness through collective action; not only in the adoption of resolutions and declarations, but in a determined effort to translate programmes into concrete multinational projects that benefit the majority of our people. The African Economic Community must have meaning to, and touch the lives of all Africans.

- **Mr. President,**
- **Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our fundamental objective is to establish the African Economic Community for the realization of continental integration and common market, as an optimum basis for accelerated economic transformation, and spring board into the international economic arena, an arena characterized by intensified competition and globalization. There is sometimes a feeling of serious concern that we are rather slow and behind time. Nevertheless, Africa must be guided by certain crucial considerations, namely: the need to lay a solid foundation that will withstand the inevitable upheavals and stand the test of time as well; the need for us to be in the driving seat, controlling and determining the agenda of our economic future and determining the direction of our journey -- a journey to a

known destination; and the need for us to ensure that the growth stimuli and the engine that propels our actions and movements are home-grown and internally generated.

As we assemble here in Harare today, to deliberate on our future and the future of our generations, we will be guided by the knowledge that the importance of the concept of time should be in relation to what we make of it, rather than what others would like us to make of it. I have no doubt that we will use the occasion of this inaugural meeting to our best advantage.

I thank you very much for your attention.