



Organization of African Unity

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## **CONFLICT PREVENTION IN AFRICA**

**Presentation by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,  
Secretary General of the Organization  
of African Unity to the International  
Conference on Preventive Strategy**

Tokyo, Japan

13 - 15 January, 1998

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Issues relating to peace, security and stability in Africa, have always been a major preoccupation for the OAU right from its inception in 1963. This preoccupation is reflected in the OAU Charter which provided for the establishment of a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration. However, experience has shown that *Ad Hoc* arrangements were found more effective than the Commission in seeking a peaceful settlement of disputes among OAU Member States. That is why most of the inter-state disputes in Africa during the 60s and 70s were addressed through *Ad Hoc* arrangements such as Committees of Heads of State, Committees of Wise Men, etc...

Towards the end of the 1980s, a succession of dramatic events began to take place world-wide as the result of the then changing character of the East-West relations. African leaders reacted to these changes, fully aware that unless they prepared themselves to respond appropriately to those events, the Continent could easily find itself marginalized in the Post-Cold War era. Therefore, at their Twenty-sixth Ordinary Session which took place in Addis Ababa, from 9 - 11 July 1990 and having taken a critical

review of the political, social and economic situation of the Continent, the Heads of State and government adopted an important Declaration in which they renewed their determination to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all the conflicts in the Continent.

The following years witnessed further commitment by African Leaders to the issue of peace, security and stability, resulting in the establishment of the "Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution" by the OAU Summit in Cairo, Egypt, in 1993.

The decision to establish the Mechanism within the OAU had been reached against the background of the increasing realization on the part of the African Leaders that Africa's efforts at development will be in vain if the Continent remained trapped in the vicious cycle of insecurity and instability. The Heads of State and Government thus saw in the establishment of such a Mechanism the opportunity to bring to the process of dealing with conflicts on the African Continent a new institutional dynamism, enabling speedy action to prevent or manage and ultimately resolve conflicts when and where they occur. Taking into account the old adage that it is better to prevent than to cure, African Heads of State and Government decided that the Mechanism would have as a primary objective, the anticipation and prevention of conflicts.

The first and overriding objective of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution is therefore that of anticipating and preventing situations of tension from turning into full-fledged conflicts. The second objective of course, concerns situations where conflicts have already occurred and which call for the undertaking of peace-making and peace-building functions in order to facilitate their resolution.

The Mechanism as provided for by the 1993 Cairo Declaration has, in brief, the following structure:

It is built around a Central Organ, composed of elected Member States with the Secretary General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. The Central Organ meets at Ambassadorial and Ministerial levels as well as at the level of Heads of State and Government.

Under the authority of the Central Organ, the Secretary General in consultation with the parties involved in the conflict, is mandated to focus efforts on conflict prevention, peace-making and peace-building. In this regard, the Secretary General may, after due consultations, resort to the use of eminent African personalities, special envoys or special representatives or, should the need arise, dispatch fact-finding missions to conflict areas.



Within the framework of the Mechanism, the OAU is mandated to co-ordinate closely its activities with the African regional and sub-regional organizations and co-operate, as appropriate, with neighbouring countries with respect to conflicts arising in the different parts of the Continent, it being understood that these regional and sub-regional organizations and countries are more familiar with the local issues. Similarly, the OAU is mandated to co-operate and work closely with the United Nations, not only with regard to issues relating to peace-making but also, and more especially, those relating to peace-keeping. In a like manner, the Secretary General is mandated to maintain close co-operation with other relevant international organizations.

An OAU Peace Fund was established for the purpose of providing financial resources on a regular and continuous basis to support exclusively OAU operational activities relating to conflict prevention, management and resolution. The Fund is made up of financial appropriations of 5 per cent of the regular budget of the OAU and voluntary contributions from within and outside the Continent. I wish here to mention, with appreciation, that the Government of Japan is one of the non-African contributors to the Peace Fund.

Since the adoption of the Mechanism, the OAU has expended considerable energy and resources in ensuring that the Mechanism takes off and becomes fully operational. Over the last years, the Mechanism has played a role in preventing the eruption of full-fledged conflicts as was the case in Togo, Congo and Gabon following political crisis in these countries. OAU's preventive efforts have taken many forms, including the use of the Good Offices of the Secretary General, the use of Eminent Persons, the use of Special Envoys, Representatives of the Secretary General, direct contacts between the OAU and the Government of the country concerned, as well as missions from the General Secretariat to the country in question. In some cases, these efforts are done on a discreet basis as part of OAU's preventive diplomacy.

Since the adoption of the Mechanism, the following are some of the major initiatives undertaken by the OAU in its efforts at addressing the scourge of conflicts in the Continent.

In collaboration with the countries of the region, the OAU was instrumental in facilitating the 1993 Arusha Peace Agreement between the then Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front. The OAU also deployed a Neutral Military Observer Group (NMOG) to monitor the implementation of the cease-fire in that country. NMOG was ultimately disbanded after the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Rwanda

that was established in 1994. Since then and following the massacres and genocide which took place in that country, the OAU has remained engaged in Rwanda, working with the Government and the international community, to facilitate the process of reconstruction and national reconciliation. The OAU also continues to insist on the need to bring to justice, all those who planned and executed the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, as one of the crucial ways of encouraging national reconciliation.

In Burundi, the OAU has remained engaged right from the inception of the current crisis, in the search for and the promotion of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. As part of its effort, the OAU established an Observer Mission in Burundi, comprising of a civilian and military components. (OMIB). Essentially, the mandate of the Mission was to restore confidence amongst the different sections of the Burundi population, and to facilitate the search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Currently, the Mission's composition has been considerably scaled down, following the most recent developments in that country and the subsequent withdrawal of the OMIB military component. In general terms, the OAU continues to work with countries of the region and the facilitator of the Burundi peace process, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania, to bring about a negotiated settlement of the Burundi conflict.



It remains a matter for deep regret that in spite of the many efforts deployed by the Regional countries and the international community, there is as yet, no end in sight for an early resolution of the conflict in Burundi.

In Somalia, the OAU continues to work in close collaboration with the UN and with the countries of the region in search for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. There has been close consultation between the regional countries, whose leaders have deployed considerable time, energy and resources to bring an end to one of the longest running and destructive conflicts in Africa. We are hopeful that Somalia will emerge from its current conflict in the not too distant future, so that its people can at last begin to address the problems of reconstructing and rehabilitating its damaged infrastructure, as well as national reconciliation and economic development.

In Liberia, the role of the OAU was critical in the mobilization of international political, financial and material support for the ECOWAS initiative. The OAU promoted the evolution of continental and international support to ECOMOG efforts and contributed to the Abuja Peace Accord and the processes that culminated in the successful elections in that country.



The Liberian experience, particularly, the sacrifices of the countries of the West African sub-region, clearly illustrated what could be achieved where there is a political will and co-ordination of efforts at the sub-regional, continental and international levels. It also showed that Africans are serious when they talk about assuming greater responsibilities for finding African solutions to African problems. It is my sincere hope that the international community will, in the future, extend early assistance to similar endeavours by African countries.

In Sierra Leone, the OAU also worked closely with ECOWAS, the UN and the Commonwealth in the negotiations that brought the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) into the peace process, that subsequently paved the way for the last elections in that country, which produced a democratic government led by President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Most unfortunately, the hard won democratic experience in Sierra Leone was abruptly terminated on 25 May, 1997, when a group of military officers decided to overthrow the democratically elected government of that country. Immediately after the coup, the OAU whose leaders were at the time meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, led the international community in unequivocally condemning the unconstitutional removal of the government of Sierra Leone and calling on the rest of the world not to recognize the

military junta. In close consultation and co-ordination with ECOWAS, the OAU is currently engaged in the search for an end to the political and security stalemate brought about by the coup d'etat in that country in May 1997. Our objective remains the restoration of constitutional order in that country.

Apart from these very well known cases, in Central Africa, the OAU has supported the initiatives undertaken by the four African Heads of State aimed at defusing the crisis in the Central African Republic and has particularly, been supportive of the efforts of the Mission for the Surveillance of the Bangui Accords (MISAB), under the leadership of General Amadou Toumani Toure.

In the Great Lakes, the OAU appointed, jointly with the UN, a Special Representative for the Region who was directly involved in the international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in the former Zaire. In the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), the OAU was also closely associated with the efforts of President Omar Bongo of Gabon and the International Mediation Committee, through the effective participation of the OAU/UN Joint Representative, Ambassador Mohammed Sahnoun.

In Western Sahara, the OAU is closely involved in the processes leading to the organization of the proposed referendum in conformity with the UN Peace Plan. Currently, the OAU has deployed official observers in the territory, to support the UN Mission which is preparing for the referendum. It is our fervent hope that a free and fair referendum will be organized at last so that a just and peaceful solution can be brought to the conflict and that the people of the region can enjoy peace, security and stability.

With respect to the situation in the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, it should be recalled that when that country was invaded by a group of mercenaries assisted by some Comorian soldiers in 1995, the OAU, through its Central Organ, acted expeditiously to prevent the conflict from degenerating into an uncontrollable situation. The OAU was also instrumental in the successful resolution of that crisis by facilitating the negotiations and subsequent Agreement between the then exiled President Djohar and the interim Government of National Unity of the Comoros. Unfortunately, as a result of a combination of factors, both political and economic, the situation in the Comoros, has once again unravelled, leading to concerns for the peace, security and stability of the Archipelago and the Indian Ocean Region. Since the eruption of this new crisis in the Comoros, the OAU has been deploying efforts aimed at promoting a peaceful and negotiated solution. In this context, the OAU organized an international



Conference on Comoros held in Addis Ababa from 10 - 13 December, 1997. This process of bringing the leadership of the various Comoran Islands to a common vision of the future of their country is continuing under the guidance of the OAU.

These are some of the experiences of the Organization of African Unity in dealing with conflict situations in the African Continent. We, at the OAU, are striving to focus our attention on preventive action but this task is not an easy one. Indeed, it is not always easy to find an entry point to allow OAU's action to prevent conflicts, particularly those within Member States since OAU's role is predicated upon the co-operation of the concerned Member States. Furthermore, our efforts are undermined by insufficient information gathering and analysis capacity. That is why, in co-operation with our partners within the international community, we are trying to establish, within the OAU, an Early Warning System which could support OAU's efforts at conflict anticipation and prevention.

Another objective in which we strongly believe is the need for international partnership in assuming our institutional responsibilities in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. From our experience, we know that efforts by individual institutions are not enough to address conflict situations. Invariably, concerted efforts are needed to maximize chances for success in conflict prevention action. We, at the OAU, are therefore



advocating for the building of a strong partnership between the various actors in preventive and resolution action based on the principles of comparative advantage and collective effort. It is in that spirit that the OAU has been working closely with regional organizations such as the ECOWAS, SADC and IGAD in the Continent in what we consider as a joint venture for peace. It is also in that spirit of partnership and solidarity that we co-operate and shall continue to co-operate with the United Nations and with other partners within the international community.