



Organization of African Unity

AFRICAN UNITY FOR A RENASCENT AFRICA

**Statement by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General
of the Organization of African Unity; at the Launching of the
African Renaissance Institute**

**Pretoria, South Africa
11 October 1999**

AFRICAN UNITY FOR A RENASCENT AFRICA :
Statement by OAU Secretary General, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim

Chairperson:

- **Your Excellency, Mr. Thabo Mbeki,**
President of the Republic of South Africa,
Nadiba, ATT Masio, M'shicles Kuesu, Nuppa, Dikwadi
- **Ambassador Kapembe Nsingo,**
Nuppa, Dikwadi
Chairman of the Board and Executive President of
The African Renaissance Institute,
- **Excellencies,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to be part of this gathering organized to formally launch the African Renaissance Institute. I would like to congratulate the founders of the Institute for their vision and wisdom in establishing the Institute which I hope will be another major contribution to the efforts of the peoples of this Continent to consolidate their hard won struggle for freedom, human dignity and justice. The Institute should also be in a position to make an important contribution to our determination to achieve political transformation and economic emancipation.

The remarkable efforts the founders of the Institute have deployed deserve the profound commendation of all of us. In this regard, I would like, on behalf of the Organization of African Unity and on my own behalf, to pay special tribute to all those who have been in the forefront and even behind the scene for launching the Institute and to assure them of my personal cooperation and the support of the Organization of African Unity wherever possible.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government and the people of South Africa for hosting this important gathering and for the very warm and African hospitality extended to us all since our arrival. Above all I would like to thank them for creating a permissive environment for the birth of the African Renaissance Institute.

I wish to pay particular tribute to President Thabo Mbeki for the critical role he is playing in promoting the thinking about Africa's renewal as we enter the 21st Century. His articulation of an emerging African Renaissance challenges us not only to reflect on what is the meaning of being African, but also it exhorts us to reflect deeply about our collective destiny and to appreciate and take pride in the strength of our past.

As we stand at the brink of the next millennium, it may seem to be superfluous to raise the issue of African Unity for a Renascent Africa, especially after the experiences we have gone through in pursuing various continental endeavours during this century. By now, one would expect this subject to be passé because its various dimensions have been repeatedly ascertained.

Indeed, the unity of the African people has been a single critical instrument that has enabled us to achieve all that we have today. The reassertion of our dignity as a people after centuries of domination, our survival amidst severe adversities, the success in achieving growth and development, and even the capacity to preserve our values, traditions and institutions, have all been a consequence of unity at various levels. In fact, whenever we have faltered in

maintaining our unity, at community, national or continental levels, we invariably have faced dire consequences.

Nevertheless, the issue of Unity for a Renascent Africa is being posed today, at the dawn of the 21st Century, not for ascertaining its validity or even legitimacy among the people of Africa. Rather, the issue is being posed in order to reflect on how we can consolidate and reinvigorate this unity within the context of a changing world. It is also being raised in order to understand its practical and operational implications during this era of globalization, and also to find out how we can surmount the obstacles that seem to erode some of the achievements we have gained so far.

The success of our struggle for de-colonization and dismantling the system of apartheid is a testimony to the power of our unity at national, regional and continental levels, as well as within the international system.

The founding fathers of our Continental Organization were able to capture and preserve this spirit through the creation of the Organization of African Unity and by entrusting it with the mission of accomplishing the tasks of liberation, nation building, and defining a place for our continent within the world as a community of nations. During the past 36 years of the existence of our Organization, we have collectively endeavoured to preserve and consolidate its achievements by anchoring its institutional operations within the collective will and initiatives of its membership, within the shared spirit of continental unity.

It is important to underline, in this connection, that the OAU was not created out of a vacuum. The formation of the Continental Organization was an

expression of the spirit and consciousness of unity that has been thriving among our people since the early part of the century. The feeling of common identity and shared destiny was strengthened during the nationalist struggles that begun in the 1940s and 1950s. By the time a majority of African countries were gaining their independence, a Pan-African identity and consciousness had already become a powerful force in all aspects of our endeavours.

For three decades, our unity, incarnated in our Continental Organization and embodied in the solidarity of our people, was essentially aimed at intensifying the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, and consolidating our independence. From Cairo to Cape Town and from Praia to Port Louis, all our people came out in unison to fight against all injustices and indignities imposed on them. Throughout that period, our unity was advanced at two levels. On the one hand, through the pursuance of the aspirations contained in the Charter of our Continental Organization stipulating the direction that we want to pursue using our collective body. On the other hand, and at a more practical level, through the active solidarity manifested by the people by giving and sharing, expression of concern and support, and a determination to take concerted action in pursuing common goals and objectives.

However, besides the activities of the Continental Organization, most of our collective engagements were limited in scope, largely non-institutionalized, and mainly inward looking. They were limited in scope because the main emphasis was on the liberation struggle, nation-building and consolidating national sovereignty. And they appeared non-institutionalized because, apart from the OAU, the operational structures for promoting joint activities among the people did not exist.

They were inward-looking in the sense that most of the efforts were focused on dealing with problems that were considered to be internal.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the situation has changed remarkably. Not only have we successfully accomplished the liberation mission, thus creating a need to refocus the impetus of our unity, but our Continent has also found itself amidst a new constellation of forces. Fundamental changes are taking place virtually everywhere in the world, calling for a more assertive and dynamic repositioning. In addition to inter-state conflicts, domestic tensions more ferocious than ever before, have emerged to erode some of the gains we made in the previous decades and to undermine our potentials for progress and prosperity. More critically, even the unity that we had forged painstakingly is now being severely threatened.

Within the scope it was initially exercised and the manner it was expressed, African Unity is now being tested by the prevailing problems and challenges. There is an imperative need to revitalize and reinvigorate African unity by putting in place institutions capable of coping with the burdens of war and economic stagnation.

This need was recognized by our leaders as early as 1990. In a far-reaching Declaration that was adopted in Addis Ababa, that year, our Heads of State and Government reaffirmed that Africa's development was, first and foremost, the responsibility of their governments and peoples. They expressed their common desire and determination to lay solid foundation for self-reliant, human-centered and sustainable development on the basis of social justice, collective responsibilities and self-reliance so as to cultivate a political culture responsive to

the needs and aspirations of our people through accelerated structural transformation of their economies.

They committed themselves to a further democratization of our societies thus ensuring good governance, transparency and accountability. They rededicated themselves to work assiduously towards economic integration through regional cooperation. They also renewed the determination of all Africans to work together through the peaceful and speedy resolution of conflicts for purposes of securing durable peace, security and stability.

During the past decade, a lot of effort has been deployed to translate these commitments into action. At a Continental level, these efforts include:

- The signing of the Abuja Treaty in 1991 establishing the African Economic Community and the subsequent steps taken to put in place various arrangements for economic integration;
- The decision by the 29th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Cairo, in 1993, to establish a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, so as to foster peace, security and stability in the Continent; and
- The Decision taken in March 1995, by a Special Session of Council of Ministers to come up with an Agenda for Action for re-launching Africa's Economic and Social Development. This agenda was a reaffirmation of our people's commitment to take responsibility in determining their destiny. A distinction was made between the things

that Africans can do for themselves in such areas as governance, economic management, human development and food security, on the one hand, and what they are looking for from their development partners in support of such efforts as debt relief, investment flows, and capacity-building, on the other hand.

- There has also been an increased level of coordination among senior policy managers at the level of the OAU through consultations and increased participation in sectoral and ministerial meetings.

Efforts are also being made at the regional level where there has been a remarkable expansion and strengthening of the Regional Economic Communities. As of today, almost every Member State, at least, belongs to one or more Economic Communities.

Important steps have also been taken in applying our unity and solidarity as instruments for the promotion of democratic governance in the Continent. The position taken by our Heads of State and Government to condemn the 1997 *coup d'état* in Sierra Leone has been reaffirmed by the 35th Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in Algiers, in July this year, where it was further decided that Member States, whose governments came to power through unconstitutional means following the Harare Summit, should restore constitutional legality, within their respective constituencies, before the next Summit, in the year 2000.

Similarly, only a month ago, at an Extraordinary Summit, held in Sirte, Libya, our Heads of State and Government decided to take up immediate steps that will lead to the establishment of a framework for the creation of an African Union

by the year 2001. In essence, this decision was taken with the determination of accelerating the implementation of the Abuja Treaty that establishes the African Economic Community.

Of course I am a realist and therefore fully conscious of the fact that a Declaration on its own, will not immediately create unity. But the Sirte Declaration can be the beginning of the deliberate movement towards unity. Its success will take time and will depend upon our collective work in reinvigorating the demand for unity and based upon our unquenchable desire for greater unity. Success will depend upon our practical work in working for unity and planning the concrete steps towards its achievement.

All these initiatives taken during the 1990s to reinvigorate our unity and concretize it into action that will enable us surmount the challenges of the new millennium are still at their initial formative stages. For a successful accomplishment of our vision we need to reinforce our commitment, enhance our capacity of implementation, and mobilize more resources. Most of these initiatives need to be translated into implementation programmes and operational strategies.

In addition to all these operational challenges we need also to deal more resolutely and decisively with the tragedy of the scourge of conflict within and between nations. The various conflicts that are raging across the Continent have led to massive loss of human lives and destruction of property. Worst of all, these conflicts have undermined our most precious asset – the unity of our Continent. Such conflicts as the one around the Great Lakes, if not resolved has the potential of embroiling a whole region into chaos, disorder hostility and instability.

The conflict in the Horn of Africa pitches former allies and turns them into archenemies. The long-term crises in Southern Sudan and in Angola generate destabilizing effects to neighbouring countries, besides the dramatic humanitarian catastrophe they have engendered. And similarly, the conflicts around the Mano River Basin has left a number of countries destabilized and suspicious of each other. In Somalia, we have been witnessing not only the death and destruction of a people but also the very disappearance of a state. Our ardent desire and commitment of fostering African Unity, within the vision of an African Renaissance, is seriously being undermined by such a prevalence of the scourge of conflicts.

We need unity. Without unity, there is not much hope for our Continent, we shall continue to remain what the cynics referred to as weak and inchoate states, high on flags and symbols, but low on substance and progress. We need unity for security, stability and development for a renascent Africa. Lack of unity within many of our Nations and the lack of unity among our countries, has contributed to the stereotyped image that seeks to perpetuate nonsensical claim of “Afro-Pessimism.” We need unity, solidarity and cohesion within our ranks in order to change things in our Continent for a better tomorrow.

Let us therefore use the occasion of this new focus on a renascent Africa to explore what more needs to be done by us for us. Let all of us in our different capacities, begin to work and work more closely together, in a more coherent manner for the unity of Africa, the peace of Africa, the security of Africa, the self respect of Africa and the development of Africa. The work will be neither easy nor quickly finished. But it can be done. It must be done. For us at the OAU, it is our duty to do it, to work, plan, campaign and act for African Unity, so that at the

end of the day, when the race is over, the day's work done, and when we are about to take our deserved rest, we can, as President Mbeki once did, proudly beat our chest and say – I am an African.

I would allow myself to think that the challenge for the Institute of African Renaissance lies in its ability to fostering of research dialogue, and a search for solutions, which will enable our Continent to achieve this aspiration. The success of this Institute will be measured in the manner in which it marshals its resources and capacities to promote the agenda for enhancing African Unity within the context of the challenges of the new millennium. It is how it can tap the African intellectual capacity, access reservoir of global knowledge, and come up with approaches that will lead to the renewal of our Continent.

I thank you all.