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**THE ROLE OF THE**  
**ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU)**  
**IN CONFLICT PREVENTION,**  
**MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION**

***LECTURE DELIVERED BY***  
***H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,***  
***SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU***  
***AT THE EDOUARDO MONDLANE UNIVERSITY,***  
***MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE***

MAPUTO, JULY 1998

**The Vice Chancellor,**

**Academic Staff and Students**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciate the kind invitation extended to me by the President and government of Mozambique to pay an official visit to this beautiful country. Mozambique is of historical, political and economic significance to the Organization of African Unity, which I represent, and to me personally. This is so, given my association at various stages of the struggle of the people of Mozambique for independence during my earlier service with the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and as a former Chairman of the United Nations Committee on decolonization.

The history of Mozambique is manifestly an integral part of the struggle of the African peoples against colonialism and for independence. It was a struggle for the liberation of Mozambicans from colonial domination after many years of Portuguese colonial rule.

The struggle for political independence waged by the Mozambican people, and, supported by numerous democratic forces culminated in the country's independence on June 25, 1975. This historic event not only advanced the frontiers of African freedom but also served as a source of inspiration to the Liberation Movements then fighting for freedom in other parts of the continent. Mozambique's contribution to the armed liberation struggle in Southern Africa is particularly of historical and political significance. This lead and gallant role played by Mozambique could not have been possible without the commitment, sacrifice and dedication of her patriots – the sons and daughters of this land.

It is, therefore, for me a matter of pride and honour to be at this University which has been named after Edouardo Mondlane, the founding father of the Liberation Struggle in Mozambique and an African patriot. Edouardo Mondlane was, indeed, a selfless and dedicated freedom fighter whose life was cut short in the cause of Mozambique's freedom and African emancipation. It is also fitting and proper that in addressing this distinguished gathering on a matter that

has gained the attention and great concern among Africa's leadership and peoples and indeed, the International Community, I should recall the exemplary leadership of the first President of this country, the late Samora Machel of blessed memory. His struggle throughout his life to resolve conflict among and between Mozambicans was exemplary. He worked tirelessly to ensure the well being of the Mozambican people through the restoration of peace and stability, the sine qua non for sustained economic and social development. It was a great setback for both Mozambique and Africa that the lives of these outstanding African leaders – Edouardo Mondlane and Samora Moises Machel were cut short so dramatically and in the most tragic circumstances. But Mozambique and Africa have continued to honour their memory by vigorously pursuing the struggles for which they fought and died.

Mr. Chairman,

Mozambicans and Africans today look back at the last few years with pride and hope at the dawn of a new era of peace and security ushered into this country through the patriotism and commitment of the



leadership of this country under its distinguished President, Joachim Chissano. The present peaceful environment prevailing in this country has also been made possible by other Mozambicans not necessarily within the political leadership. Significantly, the various roles played by all Mozambicans have made it possible today for Mozambicans to live in peace and security. We note with satisfaction that political pluralism currently exists in the Mozambican society. This is important in terms of nurturing a democratic dispensation on the basis of multi-partism. We salute Mozambicans on this achievement. It is our hope that as your society evolves from a war ravaged country to a new Mozambique striving to live up to the hopes and expectations of its people towards economic and social transformation and safeguarding and consolidating peace, a culture of tolerance, understanding and democracy among Mozambicans will continue to be strengthened. This culture is crucial for peace, stability, security and development of this country today and for future generations.

When I look back at Mozambique's struggle against colonial domination and against the background of her remarkable efforts in the

resolution of her internal conflict, I become increasingly at ease with my task today. Indeed, given your experiences of history, I have more to learn from Mozambique in the area of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution than I can impart. However, I believe it is more a demonstration of the interest of the leadership of this University and, indeed, of all gathered here to better understand the role of our Continental Organization that I was requested to speak on: *The role of the OAU in the prevention, management and resolution of Conflicts in Africa.*

The birth of the OAU in 1963, was a watershed in the many attempts, both within and outside Africa aimed at forging continental unity and solidarity and for Pan Africanism. Indeed, at the inception of our continental organization, the founding fathers were filled with both optimism and apprehension. Optimism because independent Africa was embarking on a daunting and challenging experiment in Continental unity and apprehension because at the height of the cold war both independent and colonial Africa were threatened with conflicts whose causes were either internal, or external or both.

In adopting the Charter of the OAU, African leaders were *“inspired by a Common determination to promote understanding among our peoples and cooperation among our states in response to the aspirations of our peoples for brotherhood and solidarity in a larger unity transcending ethnic and national differences”*. Additionally, they were *“Convinced that in order to translate this determination into a dynamic force in the cause of human progress, conditions for peace and security must be established and maintained”*.

In Article 19 of the OAU Charter, the founding fathers made provision for a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration, a decision that marked an historic path in the search for a viable framework that would allow for African solutions to African problems.

But, the Commission, conceived as a viable institutional framework for the settlement of disputes in Africa has, by and large, not lived up to the expectations of the founding fathers. This is, essentially, because the newly independent and sovereign States in

Africa did not feel comfortable to subject themselves to a supra-national legal framework in settling disputes between or within Member States. Thus, the OAU resorted to Ad Hoc Committees and the good offices of various Heads of State to prevent and resolve conflicts between Member States or within Member States. But, while the ad hoc approach to the settlement of disputes in the Continent did prove, to some extent, successful, it was, however, not sustainable. The lessons learned from the many ad hoc methods of conflict resolution and the frustrations encountered spurred Africa in the search for more sustainable and credible approaches to Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

Africa's efforts at conflict resolution were also frustrated by some external factors associated with the politics of the cold war. At their 26<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session in July 1990, therefore, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted a historic Declaration on the Political and Socio-economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World. This Declaration, in its paragraph 11 stated :



*“We realize at the same time that the possibilities of achieving the objective we have set will be constrained as long as an atmosphere of lasting peace and stability does not prevail in Africa. We therefore renew our determination to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all the conflicts in our Continent. The resolution of Conflicts will be conducive to the creation of peace and stability in the Continent and will also have the efforts of reducing expenditures on defense and security thus realising additional resources for socio-economic development. We are equally determined to make renewed efforts to eradicate the root causes of the refugee problem. It is only through the creation of stable conditions that Africa can fully harness its human and material resources and direct them to development”.*

This Declaration culminated in 1993 in the adoption of the Cairo Declaration establishing the OAU Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa. The Declarations of

1990 and 1993, respectively, demonstrated the resolve of African leaders to have the OAU play an increasing and effective role in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

The watershed decision to establish the Mechanism marked a turning point in Africa's determination to take the lead in the management of its conflicts. The thrust of the Mechanism, therefore, is to identify conflictual situations early enough so as to be able to anticipate and prevent them before they degenerate into violent conflicts. Anticipating conflicts is not always an easy exercise. Indeed, we recognize that fore knowledge of tensions does not necessarily guarantee a successful strategy to defuse conflict. Nonetheless, recognition of the early manifestations of impending conflict may, in specific circumstances, provide room for timely action which could prove pivotal in preventive diplomacy. As already stated, we in Africa and in the OAU have a responsibility to effectively address the scourge of conflicts in Africa.

The Mechanism is built around a Central Organ with the Secretary General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. The membership of the mechanism is made up of the State Members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government elected annually, bearing in mind the principles of equitable regional representation and rotation. In order to ensure continuity, the States of the out-going Chairman and (where known) the incoming Chairman shall also be Members of the Central Organ. In between Ordinary Sessions of the Assembly, the Central Organ assumes overall direction and coordinate the activities of the Mechanism.

The Central Organ functions at the level of Heads of State as well as that of Ministers and Ambassadors accredited to the OAU or duly authorized representatives. It can, where necessary, seek the participation of other OAU Member States in its deliberations, particularly, the neighboring countries. It can also seek, from within the continent, such military, legal and other forms of expertise as it may require in the performance of its functions.

In order to support the activities and operations of the Mechanism, a Peace Fund was established with the purpose of mobilizing financial resources to support exclusively the OAU operational activities relating to conflict management and resolution. This Fund is made up of financial appropriations from the regular budget of the OAU, voluntary contributions from Member States as well as from other sources outside Africa. While our governments continue to demonstrate a willingness to contribute to the Peace Fund, the people of Africa, who are no less concerned by the tragedies that stare them in the face, are exhorted to make a contribution.

What then have been the activities of the Mechanism since its establishment and what, indeed, can be termed its successes and shortcomings.

Since the adoption of the Mechanism, the OAU has more and more been involved in conflict prevention and conflict mediation activities. The OAU has used Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the Secretary General on a sustained basis in



Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, the Comoros and currently in Guinea-Bissau.

In Rwanda, in the wake of the armed hostilities in October 1990 between the forces of the government of the late President Juvenal Habyarimana and those of the Rwandese Patriotic Front, the OAU deployed considerable efforts, in tandem with the neighbouring countries, aimed at bringing about a peaceful resolution of the conflict. These efforts included the promotion and coordination of the Arusha peace talks under the facilitation of the United Republic of Tanzania culminating in the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement on 4 August 1993.

Following the dastardly assassination of the democratically elected President of Burundi, the late President Melechior Ndadaye, in October 1993, and the subsequent violent events in that country, the OAU, out of necessity and in the face of United Nations reluctance to get involved, decided to send a military observer team with a civilian component, to Burundi to promote confidence between and among the

parties to the conflict. Currently, there is a limited OAU presence in Burundi under my Special Representative.

In Gabon and in the republic of Congo (following the 1992 election in that country), the OAU played positive mediation roles, at the invitation of the Presidents of these countries, in defusing tensions. Regarding Liberia, the OAU deployed the services of its Eminent Person, former President Canaan Banana of Zimbabwe who worked very closely with the leaders of ECOWAS culminating in the elections last year which saw the return to civilian and constitutional rule in that country.

The case of Sierra Leone is another example of the OAU's collaborative efforts with the regional leaders in the restoration of the democratically elected government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. We have since continued to work closely with the government to ensure a speed return to normalcy and to support post conflict reconstruction and development in that country.

The OAU currently has a small military Observer Mission in the Comoros complemented by a small civilian component, both as a confidence building and preventive measure to ensure the country does not take the path of chaos and in the process, disintegrate as it is the common people who are bound to suffer.

The OAU is currently deploying efforts at various levels with a view to resolving amicably the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In this regard, a committee of Heads of State and Government set up in June this year by the Thirty-fourth Session of the Assembly of Heads of State held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and comprising the Presidents of Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Djibouti and the OAU Secretary General, recently visited both Asmara and Addis Ababa and held extensive talks with the leadership of the two countries. This visit was followed up by a fact-finding mission of the Ambassadors of the countries constituting the committee and representatives of the OAU.

The Ethiopian – Eritrean crisis clearly poses great challenges to the OAU in our efforts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts in

Africa. Indeed, any further escalation of the conflict degenerating into open warfare would not only be a tragedy for both Ethiopia and Eritrea but also for Africa as a whole. Everything must, therefore, be done to ensure the de-escalation of the situation leading to the diffusion of tensions so as to create a conducive environment for a peaceful resolution of the crisis between those two countries which were, not too long ago, seen as allies and, in fact, share a common historical past.

Regarding the armed conflict in Guinea Bissau, the OAU, in tandem with the Member States of ECOWAS, is working for the cessation of hostilities in order to create a conducive atmosphere for humanitarian intervention and the eventual peaceful resolution of the conflict.

I have, in this connection, also recently appointed and dispatched to Guinea Bissau and other countries in the West African Sub-region, my Special Envoy, Ambassador Alexandre Da Conceicao Zandamela of Mozambique to try to work with all parties concerned aimed at



arresting the armed conflict and to see how best the OAU could assist in finding a lasting and durable solution to this conflict.

In my presentation thus far I have attempted to explain what the OAU has been doing both in terms of setting up a mechanism for conflict prevention and also the concrete measures we have taken in our attempt to deal with various crises or conflict situations. All this is both relevant and important as we deal with issues of stability and security in our continent. It is however important to stress that for sustainable peace to prevail, we should not only be engaged in fire brigade exercises, in other words, dealing with a given crisis situation when it happens or confining our understanding of reasons for crises or conflicts in the context of actual fighting.

It can hardly be over-emphasized that peace is not only the absence of war or conflict. Durable peace is an all encompassing phenomenon. It is a given fact that there can be no sustainable peace without development and conversely, there can be no meaningful development in the absence of durable peace. Consequently the

Organization of African Unity has been actively involved in promoting socio-economic development in our continent and more specifically within the context of promoting cooperation among our countries. We have also been very active in promoting economic integration recognizing as we do that in order to achieve the goal of the African Economic community, we need to strengthen and build on the efforts currently being made by Africa's sub-regional organizations. It is no accident that the Abuja Treaty clearly stipulates that the regional economic groupings are the building blocs of the Community.

Prevention of conflicts a priori requires the creation of an enabling environment in our respective societies. This enabling environment includes the creation of conditions which ensure that our people have a stake in the process of governance. Issues of accountability, transparency and good governance as well as the fight against corruption are an integral part of the development process as well as of avoiding conflicts in our societies. It is important therefore to ensure that conditions are created whereby our people are not forced to vote with their feet. Regrettably, the history of our continent has

clearly demonstrated that intolerance and the inability and perhaps unwillingness to create the necessary environment for peace and security has relegated millions of our people to the status of refugees and displaced persons and exposed them to an uncertain future. This has had the effect of creating a vicious circle. Conflicts produce refugees and the latter contribute to further conflicts.

On a different but related plane, Africa more than any other continent has suffered through the violation of human rights. It is only fitting and incumbent on us, as Africans to be in the forefront in the struggle for human rights. That is why it is significant to recall the declaration adopted by our Heads of State in 1990 when they pledged to ensure further democratization of our societies and greater respect for human rights. The OAU has been actively involved in both areas in terms of urging and encouraging the democratization of our societies and the promotion and protection of human rights in our continent. In the area of human rights for example, in addition to the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, we have recently, in Ouagadougou at the 34<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and

Government, established the African Court on Human and Peoples Rights. These two institutions, if effectively utilized and their provisions strictly adhered to, can make a major difference towards the strengthening or inculcating greater respect for human rights in our continent.

In the area of democratization, we have been involved in election observation in countries which are either making a transition to political pluralism or are continuing the process of opening up their societies. This exercise provides the OAU with an opportunity to contribute to the democratization process and to the building of confidence amongst the body politic in the countries concerned.

I should like to stress here that the holding of elections do not necessarily ensure democracy or good governance. Long after the ritual of ballot casting, there comes the more crucial and challenging phase. This phase involves the strengthening of democratic institutions, the respect for the various institutions of the State, and the building and sustenance of the culture of tolerance, transparency



and accountability and good governance. After an election, both winners and losers alike must feel a sense of common security and destiny, in other words, all must feel that the process has emerged the victor and everyone has a stake in ensuring that peace and security for all is maintained in order to create the right and conducive atmosphere where the development and wellbeing of the individual as well as that of the society become the common goal.

In sum therefore, the OAU takes the challenge of a conflict prevention, management and resolution as an all embracing challenge and our Organization is steadily but surely equipping itself to make its contribution in the multifaceted dimension of this challenge in the next millenium.

Another vital element in promoting peace in our continent, especially where conflict already exists is in the area of peace keeping and peace making. As has been evidenced in the recent past, non-African States have demonstrated their reluctance to participate in peacekeeping missions in Africa. Consequently, African leaders at

their Summit in June 1995 in Addis Ababa decided that military contingents should be earmarked in the national armed forces of Member States which can be deployed in times of crisis and need essentially by the United Nations but in exceptional cases under the umbrella of the OAU. The underlying consideration of this standing arrangement is to ensure that African peace-keeping forces can be deployed in conflict areas with improved reaction time which is vital in preventing large scale violence such as the events we witnessed in Rwanda and which culminated in the massacres and genocide of 1994.

Pursuant to this standby arrangement concept, the OAU in 1996 organized the first ever meeting of the Army Chiefs of Defence Staff of the Members of the Central Organ in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This meeting marked the beginning of Africa's efforts at coordinating strategic planning for OAU peace support operations. A follow-up meeting was held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in October 1997 where a number of recommendations geared towards the enhancement of Africa's peacekeeping capability were made for consideration and,

were adopted by Africa's leaders at their last Summit in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso last month.

In conclusion, the OAU has over the years recognized that the business of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts is, indeed, a very expensive business. In this context, there is need to involve all sections of society, universities and Non Governmental Organizations as well as other civil society organizations in this business. To achieve this noble cause, the OAU has embarked on demarches aimed at involving the civil society and the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in our common search for peace, stability and security in the Continent. In the not too long future, a meeting involving the civil society and the NGO Community, in particular, African NGOs would be convened in Addis Ababa so that together we can map out strategies for tackling Africa's conflicts.

Peace is a very precious commodity. This is universally so. In our continent the search for peace, security and stability is of utmost

and pressing priority. No meaningful development is conceivable without peace.

Let us all, therefore, whether in or out of the government; whether on the farm or in the office or factory, strive to build and consolidate peace. Where there is disagreement, let us stem it from degenerating into a dispute. If it unfortunately degenerates into open conflict, let us explore avenues to contain and resolve it peacefully and in the spirit of African solidarity and fraternity. Above all, let us create conditions in our respective societies which are conducive to peace and the sustenance of lasting and durable peace.

I thank you.