



Organization of African Unity

## **OAU: Past, Present and Future**

**Lecture delivered by  
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at the National Defence College**

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**The Chief of the General Staff, General Daudi Jonje,  
The Army Commander, Lt. General Abdullahi Adam,  
The Commandant of the National Defence College,  
Lt. General Kibwana,  
Senior Officers of the Kenya Armed Forces present,  
Gentlemen,**

I wish from the outset to thank the Commandant of the National Defence College, Lieutenant General Kibwana, for inviting me to address the participants to this course. This invitation clearly demonstrates the interest of the leadership of this college and the participants to this course to better understand the role and responsibilities of our continental organization. This invitation is also timely as we, at the OAU, are currently engaged in efforts at strengthening Africa's capacity to respond to crisis situations in the continent and to enhance Africa's peacekeeping capacity. It was in this context that two meetings of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of Members of the OAU Central Organ were convened by the OAU in 1996 and 1997 respectively in Addis Ababa and Harare. On a personal note, having been closely associated with the defence establishment at a certain point in my national responsibilities, serving as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, I must say that I am particularly happy to be amongst you at this Defence College.

I have been requested to address the participants on the subject of the OAU: Past, Present and Future. This is clearly a vast topic and on this account, I shall limit myself to highlighting only some of the major developments which marked our Organization since its inception and provided momentum for the challenges facing the continent as we move towards the new millennium.

The establishment of OAU, 35 years ago, was a culmination of many attempts, both inside and outside Africa, aimed at forging continental unity and solidarity. Indeed, given that this was a period which was characterized as being among the coldest days of the cold war with the East-West confrontation at its prime and its attendant repercussions in our continent, the very creation of the OAU was a major achievement. In establishing the OAU, the Founding Fathers were conscious of the need to:

- a) promote the unity and solidarity of the African States;
- b) co-ordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve better life for the peoples of Africa;
- c) defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence;

- d) eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and
- e) promote international cooperation, having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These have remained the major strategic interests guiding Africa's march towards unity and solidarity. These goals were a result of a clear perception on the part of the African leaders on the nature and structure of the international system within which Africa was to articulate and defend its aspirations and demands.

African leaders realized the imperative necessity to formulate regional strategies and the need to initiate specific collective actions to strengthen their collective bargaining capacity within the international system. In this regard, the OAU Member States increasingly felt the need to coordinate and harmonize their general policies, especially in the following areas:

- a) political and diplomatic fields;
- b) economic cooperation, including transport and communication;

- c) education and cultural cooperation;
- d) health, sanitation and nutritional cooperation;
- e) scientific and technological cooperation; and
- f) cooperation for defence and security.

The ultimate objective for the coordination and harmonization of policies was to provide the fragile African States, emerging from colonial rule and confronted with a hostile international political and economic environment, a sense of collective security in its broader meaning.

The major pre-occupation of the African leaders at the formative stage of the OAU was absolute dedication to the emancipation of the African territories which were still under colonial rule. Against this background, the Founding Fathers decided to establish the OAU Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to coordinate the activities of liberation movements and to play a catalytic role in the overall struggle against colonialism and Apartheid.

The struggle was successfully conducted, with the OAU playing a leading role, and by the mid seventies, more than 41 countries had attained



their political independence. With the emergence of a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa in 1994 and the winding up of the OAU Liberation Committee, the chapter of the struggle against colonialism and institutionalized racism had been closed. Significantly, African countries played a pivotal role in achieving this objective. For Africa's unity against the twin system of colonialism and racism was unshakable. Indeed, precisely because of this total commitment of Africa and its continental Organization to the liberation of the continent, that some of Africa's detractors prepared obituaries for the OAU under the mistaken notion that the only thing that united Africans was their opposition to colonialism and apartheid.

In tandem with efforts directed at the decolonization process, OAU Member States were also confronted with the challenge of consolidating national sovereignty, defending territorial integrity and independence, coping with the exigencies of nation building, and meeting the basic needs of the people. In this regard, the focus was on the establishment of national institutions to support socio-economic development and progress and to address the scourge of poverty, disease and ignorance. Considerable efforts were initiated by our countries and significant progress was achieved. Unfortunately these efforts could not be sustained due to both internal and external factors.

Internally, there have been problems related to governance and management, lack of popular participation, and insufficient trickle-down of

development benefits. On the external side, the collapse in international prices of primary commodities and the world economic recession have all contributed to the inability of the African countries to effect structural transformation. In addition, the decline or, at best stagnation in resource flows, the volatility and fluctuation of exchange currencies as well as mounting debt service obligations and worsening balance of payment deficits, have also contributed to the poor socio-economic performance of the African region.

It was amidst this background that more attention was devoted, from the mid seventies to the late eighties, towards formulating coherent strategies that could promote Africa's socio-economic development and recovery.

Indeed, between 1973 and 1990, a series of Strategies, Declarations and Plans of Action were adopted within the framework of the OAU. These include: the 1973 Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence, the 1979 Monrovia Strategy for Economic Development of Africa, the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action and the 1986 African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery.

All these initiatives were attempts by our Member States to develop collective responses to the socio-economic problems facing the continent. Despite tremendous efforts and commitments by our countries, these strategies

and programmes did not yield positive results essentially because of a lack of indigenous capacity to mobilize domestic resources as well as the absence of adequate international support. This was therefore a period of missed opportunities for our continent.

Deriving from the lessons of the past decades and taking into account the then fundamental global changes that were taking place, the OAU leaders met in Addis Ababa in 1990, reviewed the conditions of the continent and adopted a far-reaching Declaration paving the way for a new departure for our continent. This historic Declaration followed a Report which I presented to the Assembly "on the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and their Implications for Africa: Proposals for Africa's Response."

In that Declaration, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed that Africa's development was the responsibility of their governments and peoples. They expressed their determination to lay solid foundation for self-reliant, human-centred and sustainable development on the basis of social justice and collective self-reliance, so as to achieve accelerated structural transformation of their economies. Within that context, they rededicated themselves to work assiduously towards economic integration through regional cooperation. They also expressed their determination to take urgent measures to rationalize the existing economic groupings on the continent in order to



increase their effectiveness in promoting economic integration and establishing an African Economic Community.

The African leaders stated that they were fully aware that in order to facilitate the process of socio-economic transformation and integration, it was necessary to promote popular participation of their peoples in the political and development processes. They considered that a political environment which guarantees human rights and the observance of the rule of law, would assure high standards of probity and accountability particularly on the part of those who hold public office. In addition, they felt that popular-based political processes would ensure the involvement of all, including in particular women and youth in development efforts. They accordingly recommitted themselves to the further democratization of their societies and to the consolidation of democratic institutions in their countries. Furthermore, they reaffirmed the right of African countries to determine, in all sovereignty, their system of democracy on the basis of their socio-cultural values, taking into account the realities of each particular country and the necessity to ensure development and satisfy the basic needs of their peoples.

The Summit therefore renewed the determination of Africans to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all the conflicts on the continent. They considered this to be conducive to the creation of peace and stability in the continent and also to have the effect of reducing

expenditures on defence and security, thus releasing additional resources for socio-economic development.

The 1990 Declaration thus provided the continent with a new momentum in its efforts to collectively address the challenges facing the African people. It was in this new perspective that the Heads of State and Government met in Abuja, in June 1991, and signed the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. Among the objectives of the Community established under the Treaty is to promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of African economies in order to increase economic self-reliance and promote an indigenous and self-sustained development. The Treaty was conceived as an operational framework for the development, mobilization and utilization of the human and material resources of Africa and as an instrument to promote economic cooperation and integration. It provides that the Community is to be established gradually in six (6) stages of variable duration over a transitional period not exceeding thirty-four (34) years. The Treaty recognizes the Regional Economic Communities as the pillars of the African Economic Community.

The Abuja Treaty was, therefore, a culmination and consolidation of all the policy issues on Africa's socio-economic development and transformation initiated by Africa between 1970 and 1990. The Treaty entered into force in 1994 and since then, efforts are being made to implement its

provisions. The last Summit of our Organization which was held, in Harare last year, convened, for the first time, as the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Economic Community. Moreover, during the last Session of Council, which was held in Addis Ababa last February, the Protocol between the African Economic Community and the Regional Economic Communities was signed thus opening the way for enhanced cooperation between the African Economic Community and the Regional Groupings in a dynamic partnership.

As part of the renewed efforts of our Organization to assume its responsibilities in the changing global context, the Twenty-ninth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in Cairo in June 1993, decided to establish, within the Organization of African Unity, a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This was a concrete step towards the implementation of the objectives of the 1990 Declaration. In adopting the Declaration, the African leaders were re-affirming their commitment to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts. It was also a realization by the African leaders that one of the most serious impediments to Africa's development was the scourge of conflict.

Before the adoption of the Mechanism, Africa had used several other modalities for conflict resolution in Africa. The OAU Charter for instance, provided for the establishment of the Commission of Mediation,



Conciliation and Arbitration. This was the sole organ of the OAU especially and exclusively charged with conflict resolution. But, for various reasons, the Commission has remained virtually dormant since its establishment.

Conflicts in Africa were therefore dealt with in an Ad Hoc basis, through diplomatic means. The use of Ad Hoc committees became prevalent in the 60s and 70s. Moreover, the recourse to Committees of Heads of State and Government and the use of Elder Statesmen were also common during the same period.

In establishing the Mechanism, African leaders saw the opportunity to bring to the process of dealing with conflicts on the continent a new institutional dynamism, enabling speedy action to prevent or manage and ultimately resolve conflicts when and where they occur. In this regard, the Mechanism has, as a primary objective, the anticipation and prevention of conflicts. In circumstances where conflicts have occurred, the Mechanism has the responsibility of undertaking peacemaking and peace building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of these conflicts.

The Mechanism is built around a Central Organ with the Secretary General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. The Central Organ of the Mechanism is composed of the Member States of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government plus the countries of the out-going Chairman



and the in-coming Chairman, bearing in mind the principle of equitable regional representation and rotation.

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 may, where necessary, seek the participation of other OAU Member States in its deliberation, particularly the countries neighbouring the conflict area. The OAU is also to cooperate and work closely with the United Nations and African Regional Organizations. A special Fund has been established for the purpose of providing financial resources to support exclusively the OAU operational activities relating to conflict management and resolution. The Fund is made up of financial appropriations from the regular budget of the OAU, as well as voluntary contributions from Member States and from other sources within Africa. Financial contribution from sources outside Africa may also be accepted. So far, a number of African and non-African countries have made contributions to support activities related to the Mechanism.

Since the operationalization of the Mechanism, 5 years ago, the OAU has been striving to build its capacity to respond more effectively to the objectives set out in the Mechanism. It is in that context that the OAU has been deploying efforts at addressing conflict situations in the continent. It has been involved in efforts at seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict in

Burundi. In this respect, the OAU has been working closely with the countries of the region and with the Facilitator of the Burundi Peace Talk, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. The OAU has also been associated in efforts aimed at defusing tension in the Great Lakes Region and at promoting a durable solution to the humanitarian crisis in that region. It has also supported efforts of ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Somalia and Sudan, the OAU has been supporting efforts particularly those by the IGAD countries aimed at seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict.

In Western Sahara, the OAU has been working closely with the UN towards the implementation of the UN Settlement Plan and the holding of a free and fair Referendum for the people of Western Sahara. As part of its efforts, the OAU has deployed observers who are currently in the Territory. In the Comoros, the Organization of African Unity has played a crucial role in defusing the crisis which erupted in that country following the 1995 coup d'etat. Since then and pursuant to the crisis which erupted again in that country in relation to the situation in Anjouan, the OAU has been deploying sustained efforts to promote a peaceful and negotiated solution. The OAU has currently 20 military observers in the Comoros who are working under the OAU Chief Liaison Officer in Moroni.

In its efforts to address conflict situations, the OAU has always made it a point to coordinate and work closely with the countries of the region

and their organizations, the United Nations and other organizations such as the League of Arab States as well as the sub-regional Organizations in the continent.

In parallel with its efforts at dealing with conflict situations, the OAU is also involved in supporting its Member States in their endeavours at promoting the democratization process. In this regard, the OAU is frequently invited to observe elections in our Member States. The OAU has also been advocating for the strengthening of institutions for the sustenance of democracy and good governance, the respect for human rights and the rule of law in our countries.

#### **Commandant and Senior Officers.**

I have strived in my previous remarks to highlight the new challenges facing our continent and its Organization. I have also covered some of the efforts being made by our Organization and its Member States to meet these challenges. But, despite all these efforts, a lot needs to be done to respond to the aspirations and demands of our people.

To begin with, it is important that we overcome the hiatus that exists between declarations and resolutions adopted by our Organization at various levels and their actual implementation. Put succinctly, the OAU is not in short



supply of strategies and Programmes of Action. A visit to the OAU Archives provides eloquent testimony to this. Yet though we have made progress in various fields, this progress is not commensurate with the requirements of the situation and the challenges of the day. A few examples graphically explain part of our weakness.

The issue of developing and improving transport and communication within our continent was recognized as a major challenge from the very foundation of the OAU. Indeed this issue has even been mentioned in the Charter. And not without reason. We all recognize that meaningful cooperation and integration between our countries a priori require the building of appropriate infrastructure. Yet, despite some improvement here and there, it is still a fact that it is much easier and quicker to travel in between some African countries through a European destination. Similarly attempting to have a telephone conversation with some African countries at times constitutes a constant nightmare. It is always easier to do so linking through a former metropolitan capital. This is an anachronism which must be overcome if the issue of continental integration is to be a realisable goal in the near future.

Economic integration and the emergence of the African Economic Community presupposes that our people must be able to interact and do business with each other. After all the community is not only about goods and services. It is above all about people. The free movement of people remains a



major hurdle. I recall what the President of the World Bank, the late Mr. Canable told the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Abuja in 1991 on the occasion of the signing of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. He said, "It is easier for me a *Muzungu* to travel from one African country to another than an African to do so". Although the countries of West Africa through their sub-regional Organization, the ECOWAS have made significant strides on this, the rest of Africa has a long way to go.

As we prepare ourselves to enter the new millennium, we must overcome these anomalies. We must vigorously pursue the agenda of economic cooperation and integration, so as to put into full use the tremendous potential that lies in our continent. Ours is a rich continent in terms of resources, both human and material. Yet ours is also a continent with the poorest people. This must change. And only our combined efforts and determination – the same steel determination that enabled us to liberate our continent from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid – can make a difference. It is encouraging to note that there is an emerging awareness on the part of African States on the need to forge ahead towards greater economic integration. The activities of SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS, and IGAD and recently the relaunching of East African Cooperation augurs well for the continent. But we have no time to waste. We must endeavour to overcome all types of barriers both real and artificial which mitigate against cooperation and integration.

At the national level, most African countries are now committed to improving the domestic economic environment by implementing wide ranging structural adjustment programmes which have been politically and socially painful and costly. It is however important that in designing adjustment programmes, provision should be made for special measures aimed at protecting the most vulnerable groups during the adjustment period namely children, women, the aging and the urban and rural poor. It is equally important that programmes must be flexible and adapted to the particular circumstances of the countries so that important social sectors such as health and education are not unduly compromised. This is vital for I vividly recall the warning given by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in 1989 when it stated: "Africa may begin the next millennium with a greater proportion of its population being both innumerate illiterate and unskilled more than it did at the beginning of the post independence era in 1960s".

Indeed sustainable development should not merely seek to reduce deficits or eliminate price distortion or for that matter deal with fiscal demand management aspects of the economy alone. It should ensure that it does not impose undue hardships on those who should, in the final analysis, benefit from it. Sustainable development must address critical areas of development such as health, nutrition, education, employment and investment in the productive sectors of the economy as well.

The odds against our countries are formidable. The majority of Africa's population is poor, illfed and technologically backward. In addition we not only have to face man-made disasters such as conflicts and civil wars producing in the process millions of refugees and displaced persons but also natural calamities such as drought and desertification and more recently, the hazards of El Nino. We are also faced with the AIDs pandemic.

All these require our collective action. But this also require international solidarity. Nowhere is this solidarity more urgently required than in dealing with the excruciating debt burden. Since 1980, Africa's external debt has been sharply rising. Today, it is more than 300 billion U.S. dollars. In absolute terms, Africa may seem to be the least indebted of all developing countries. However, the terms of debt per capita and in relation to the continent's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and level of development Africa is worst hit. Clearly all the monumental efforts being made by our countries at economic and political reforms will continue to be severely undermined if the issue of external indebtedness is not seriously addressed by our partners in the international community.

I have already stated that the challenges and priorities of our Organization have now been adapted to confront the new challenges. Economic development – or if you will – economic liberation is one such challenge. We



all recognize however, that there cannot be economic development without peace and stability in as much as there cannot be peace without development.

Peace does not presuppose the absence of war or conflicts alone. It presupposes the existence of situations which guarantee the enjoyment of basic rights and fundamental freedoms by all. It presupposes the existence of governments elected freely by the people and accountable to them. It presupposes a constant fight against the scourge of corruption which in some cases, is in danger of destroying the very fabric of our societies. It requires that we fight the temptation to divide our societies in racial, religious or ethnic terms. It follows therefore that as complement to the search for a more equitable economic system, corresponding efforts should be applied to the fight against injustices and other forms of human oppression.

This year the United Nations will be celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This historic commitment is a universal one. But it has a particular meaning to us Africans. After all no people have suffered more violations of such rights including their very dignity as the African people.

This is therefore the time to rededicate ourselves to the full respect and observance of the Rights enshrined in the Declaration. The OAU in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the



Government of Angola will be having a major conference on Human Rights in Africa in Luanda, Angola in October this year. We hope to evaluate the status of human rights in our continent bearing in mind the provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

At the same time, we intend to intensify our efforts at conflict prevention, management and resolution using the Mechanism which has been established by our Heads of State. All this is necessary so that we can change the image of our continent where conflicts are viewed as endemic and where human rights violations are considered routine and military usurpation of power tolerated.

#### **Commandants and Senior Officers,**

In the course of many years since most of our countries achieved their independence, our continent has faced trials and tribulations. Some of our shortcomings have been externally inspired. We must however, also have the courage to admit that many of the errors have been of our own making. In the course of the recent years especially in this decade, the continent has been characterised by a new vision – a vision of Africa resolute in its intention to pull together and mount a united assault on its economic and social problems. There is a growing commitment and determination to change things for the

better at the national, sub-regional and continental level. Yet, in less than three years before we enter the twenty first century, we still face tremendous problems and obstacles. This situation is more worrisome particularly now when the global environment is undergoing fundamental transformations, involving the re-definition of economic interests and the forging of new political and economic alliances.

The outcome of these current developments are bound to dictate the course of the world in the next century. The political and economic alliances now being formed shall dominate world trade, commerce and manufacturing. Where will Africa be? What shall its role be in this new and emerging picture of the world which unquestionably will be highly competitive? Will Africa be a player or a viable partner in the new world or shall it be too preoccupied with its poverty and endless conflicts to be of any relevance? How can Africa ensure that it is not relegated to the sidelines and marginalized in the equation of the emerging world?

These and many more questions must form the major part of Africa's Agenda in the next century. Africa can not possibly expect to be a viable partner in the new world unless it takes itself seriously and puts its own house in order. It must take the issues of peace, stability, security and economic integration seriously. For only a United Africa, one which acts together and speaks in one voice, can stand up to the challenges of the next

century. We have the instruments and framework to achieve these objectives. We have for example the African Economic Community and the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Our challenge is to ensure that these instruments are not reduced to pious declarations of intentions.

At the same time, it can hardly be over-emphasized that in meeting the challenges that confront us we need to mobilize all our resources especially our human resources. The women of Africa who have played such an important role in our liberation struggles as well as in our social and economic development have to be fully involved in this vital struggle. It means that women can no longer continue to be erroneously regarded as a peripheral force in Africa's development. In this respect, we must launch a coordinated attack on the social attitudes which have combined with our own thinking on economic development to produce a syndrome of ineffectual platitudes about the women's role in our development process. Time has come, when we must together, men and women, transcend the so called niceties of the old order which has subjected women into underdogs in both national and international politics and which has socially established norms which work against the process of women integration and empowerment. Let me repeat, we must work together and in unison. For, as Africa moves in the last three years of the twentieth century and into the twenty first century, it will need to harness all its resources, in particular human resources, to face the challenges with more confidence.



The potential of women in our continent has yet to be realized; and if we seek to achieve full and genuine development, we have no choice but to embark on deliberate policies to bring the women to the centre of our development strategies. We must fight the social and systemic prejudices, which until now, have engineered the relegation of the women to the bottom of the social, economic and political ladder.

**Commandant and Senior Officers,**

Africa has articulated its own collective agenda for peace and development. This agenda has emerged as a result of its own reflection on its past achievements and shortfalls. What is now required is to mobilize the necessary capacity to translate the objectives of this agenda into concrete action and outcomes. In this endeavour, the OAU has a role to play and has a responsibility to support its Member States. However, to be able to do so, the Organization should be strengthened and equipped with the necessary means.

That is why we have embarked on a major programme of reform and renewal of the General Secretariat to enable it perform its mission in the service of its Member States more efficiently and effectively. This involves principally the restructuring of the General Secretariat, improving the image of the Continent and its Organization, the harmonization of the OAU Charter and the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, devising a strategy



for mobilizing extra-budgetary resources and building a modern Headquarters of the Organization.

This programme also involves bringing the OAU closer to the civil society. Indeed, since its establishment in 1963, the Organization of African Unity was perceived as largely a political institution dealing mostly with governments. It would seem that even the African elite has had little contact with the Organization. Few of the African Universities or higher Institutions of Learning have a specific curriculum on the OAU. The Organization is treated in the academic circles just like any other international organization and its relevance to Africa or even its role to the development of this continent is little known among University students and their lecturers. Yet, African Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning must be at the forefront in interacting with the OAU and in promoting its objectives.

The OAU cannot afford to continue to function as a bureaucratic institution. The Organization has to adapt to the changing situation. There is need for the OAU to get closer to the people and work with the people. The OAU should put the people at the centre of its efforts. This, indeed, is the essence of the new partnership we would like to build between the OAU, its Member States and the people.

The OAU enjoys a great prestige and has an impressive record as an Organization which has championed the cause of Africa's freedom, defended the Continent's dignity and forged links of solidarity between its peoples.

The challenge ahead is for the OAU to initiate a sensitization campaign to make the African peoples more informed about their Organization and appreciate its relevance to their socio-economic development efforts and to strengthening solidarity among its people.

Indeed, in the 1960s, the level of African solidarity provided the necessary momentum in the struggles for the decolonization on the continent. Africa was able to speak with one voice in all international fora. It was this sense of togetherness that enabled Africa to forge forward in the promotion and defence of African interests. Today, that solidarity is being tested under the severe economic conditions facing the continent. African solidarity is as important today as it was during the decononization period. My fervent hope, therefore, is that together, Member States, the General Secretariat and the African people, we should contribute towards consolidating our continental Organization to allow it to meet the challenges facing us as we prepare to enter the new millennium.