



Organization of African Unity

"OAU MECHANISM ON CONFLICT PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION"

LECTURE BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM

TO

THE SUDANESE UN ASSOCIATION

Khartoum, Sudan

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Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be back in the friendly and hospitable city of Khartoum, the confluence of two great African Rivers - the Blue Nile and the White Nile. I am indeed happy to be in this great country which is dear to many Africans. On a personal note, I am indeed delighted to be in the Sudan where I have some of my best friends and colleagues. It is the Sudan that many African pilgrims, on their way to the holy pilgrimage to Mecca sought to make point of rest, and inspiration as they prepared for their onward journey. Some settled down permanently because of the warmth and hospitality of the great people of this country. In many ways than one, therefore, the Sudan reflects the African family, as it brings together a wonderfully rich diversity of civilizations, religions and cultures and constitutes a microcosm of Africa

The unity, strength and progress of this country is indeed important not only for its people but for Africa as a whole. In the same manner, the problems and agonies facing the Sudan are also problems and agonies for all of us. That is why, we are one with the people of the Sudan in their efforts to achieve national concord, peace, security and stability.

Mr. Chairman,

I was delighted and honoured to receive an invitation from my brother and friend, Ambassador Omer Yusuf Birido, to deliver a lecture on the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution to the Sudanese UN Association, in memory of its late Chairman, Ambassador Fakhredin Mohammed. Ambassador Fakhredin Mohammed, in whose honour we are gathered here today, was one of those who, recognized right from the beginning, the centrality of collective multilateral efforts in advancing the cause of our common humanity. Having had the privilege of associating with our late brother, I can testify to the great faith he had in the universal mission of the United Nations and in the interdependence of the world community. Ambassador Fakhredin Mohammed was, as is well known, one of the pioneers of the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs at its inception in 1956. At a very early stage in his career, he served at the United Nations where he had a long stint of distinguished diplomatic engagements. As if to underscore his great faith in multilateral diplomacy to which I alluded earlier, he was appointed Ambassador to Ethiopia which is also home to our Continental Organization - the OAU.

It was by sheer dint of hard work and a well-deserved recognition by his country, that he rose to the position of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs before his retirement. Thereafter, it was again hardly surprising that he did not follow the logic of retirement, but rather chose the exacting course of raising young Diplomats in Saudi Arabia and also in his home country, the Sudan. Additionally, we

have come to appreciate his other pre-occupations, including his artistic creations some of which have now become collector's items.

Mr. Chairman,

The Fakhredin Mohammed, that I know, was active in sports and cultivated a wide circle of friends internationally and earned the respect of all who knew him. We shared many wonderful moments at the United Nations. He was a distinguished, accomplished and effective diplomat. I personally learnt a lot from him. At a relatively young age of 28 when I took over as Tanzania's Ambassador and Permanent Representative at the United Nations in February 1970, Amb. Fakhredin whom I considered as an elder brother was unfailingly gracious and always helpful. He was one of the few people who could be described as having no political colour, as he maintained excellent relationships with politicians across the political spectrum both at home and internationally. He was therefore an outstanding Internationalist and Nationalist at the same time and did not seem to have any problems combining the two positions. Indeed, for him, the two were not mutually exclusive, but complemented each other. He was a firm believer in the OAU and presented papers at Seminars, which sought to popularize the Organization.

One of the most enduring and consistent positions he took during his active years in the Foreign Service was to insist on Sudan's active support for the Liberation Struggle in Africa, which struggle was successfully concluded with the

ending of the inglorious rule of Apartheid, the holding of a peaceful election and the transition to a non-racial, multi-party democracy in South Africa. In a sense therefore, Ambassador Fakhredin Mohammed, who was one of the contributors to the drafting of the OAU Charter, devoted a good part of his life reconciling the spirit and the words of the Charter with the aspirations of the African people for brotherhood and solidarity, in a larger unity transcending linguistic, ideological, ethnic, racial and national differences.

If I have unusually dwelt at length on the personality profile of our late colleague and brother, Ambassador Fakhredin, it is not so much to tell you what many of you here already know, but more seriously, to draw attention to the remarkable and abiding faith which this great son of the Sudan and indeed of Africa, had in the capacity of an empowered Continent to accomplish the arduous task of meeting the triple challenges of decolonization, economic development and maintenance of peace and security.

Indeed, at a time when some sections of the International Community seem to be consumed by the media-created and misplaced notion of Afro-pessimism, as well as many other distortions of the prevailing situation on our Continent, we ought to draw inspiration from the Founding Fathers of the OAU and distinguished Africans like Ambassador Fakhredin, who had foreseen the end of Apartheid and colonization, as well as the flourishing of freedoms that they desired so much and sought for, to the benefit of all the peoples of Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

The rapprochement between the two main Superpowers and the end of the Cold War meant that Africa had to expect dramatic changes in the international and even National environment of its politics. And changes did come! In some regions of our Continent, the Cold War's demise helped defuse tensions and facilitate the launching of multilateral operations to bring to closure local conflicts that no longer had much resonance internationally like the case of Namibia and to some extent that of South Africa.

Regrettably, in other regions, the ebbing of the Cold War contributed to new or continuing instability. In these areas, the end of the Cold War had unleashed conflicts formerly overshadowed by strong Nationalist governments and Superpower rivalries. This re-emergence of age-old hatreds effectively challenged both African and the International Community's ability to devise principled and effective means of response. Concurrently, this period coincided with the early beginnings of economic and social turmoil which created a crises of governance. Similarly, internal and external forces began to pressurize for more accountability, economically as well as politically.

It was against this background, that the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in 1990 adopted the Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World. In that Declaration, the leaders of Africa, committed themselves to work towards the peaceful and speedy resolution

of all conflicts in Africa, so as to create an enabling environment for development. This was definitely a landmark decision by the OAU as it represented an African recognition that efforts aimed at economic development, democratization, human rights and the resolution of other critical challenges confronting the Continent, would remain constrained as long as conflicts continued to ravage the Continent.

Additionally, the 1990 Declaration recognized the changing nature of African conflicts which had moved from inter-State, for the resolution of which serious and sustained efforts had been deployed by the OAU in the past, to intra-State which now required a more dynamic approach in addressing them. In pointing the way forward, the landmark 1990 Declaration, set the stage for a review of past OAU approaches to Conflict Resolution, with the ultimate objective of bringing about an enhanced institutional capacity and dynamism into the ways that Africa resolved many of the violent conflicts, that have caused vast human misery in several parts of the Continent and in some instances, opened the doors for manoeuvring by non-African powers.

In a way therefore, the 1990 Declaration, by emphasizing the centrality of the role of Africans in advancing conflict resolution initiatives, squarely placed primary responsibility for action in this realm on the Continent and on its Organization, the OAU. Indeed, as if to underscore this fact, the following year, in 1991, the OAU Council of Ministers, for the first time in the history of the Organization, approved an appropriation in the General budget of the OAU, to be used for Conflict Resolution purposes. This

was followed by Council's acceptance, in February 1992, of my proposal to restructure the General Secretariat with a view to making it more responsive to its assigned responsibilities, in particular, that of Conflict Management. The Division of Conflict Management, charged with the task of Conflict Prevention and Resolution, was set up in March 1992.

This was the improved environment which no doubt facilitated the extensive consultations which I initiated between the General Secretariat of the OAU and our Member States, in order to clearly define the essential elements, that would give the 1990 Declaration, an operational context. Those consultations primarily focused on the need to establish a permanent Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of conflicts in Africa within the OAU. At the end of our consultations, I submitted to the Fifty-sixth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers and the Twenty-eighth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Dakar, Senegal, in 1992, a Report which contained various institutional options and specific recommendations regarding the Mechanism. My report provoked lengthy and extensive debates in Dakar, which was evidence of the interest and importance that Member States attached to the initiative. In the process, serious concerns were also raised over some aspects of the proposals, including the problem of possible interference in the internal affairs of Member States, the role of the OAU in peace-keeping operations and concern over the undue influence of extra-African forces through their funding capacity. As is now well known, that

Mechanism, which was agreed upon in principle, was itself subject to another round of in-depth study and comprehensive consultations with Member States to fine tune the proposals.

At the end of this exhaustive but necessary process, the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, meeting in their Twenty-ninth Ordinary Session in Cairo, Egypt, adopted the Declaration on the establishment, within the OAU, of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

The Mechanism is built around a Central Organ composed of Member States with the Secretary General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. Its primary objective is conflict anticipation and prevention. It does, however, recognize the importance of other peacemaking and peace-building functions which can be fulfilled within the framework of the Mechanism. Observation missions of limited duration are envisaged and if peace-keeping becomes necessary, recourse would be made to the United Nations under the general terms of its Charter. Indeed, co-operation arrangements with Regional and International Organizations are clearly spelt out in the Cairo Declaration.

One of the most significant decisions taken by African leaders in Cairo, was the establishment of an OAU Peace Fund to be financed through OAU regular budget appropriations as well as voluntary contributions from African and non-African sources.

Mr. Chairman,

I have taken sometime to explain the processes and efforts that went into the establishment of the Conflict Resolution Mechanism, in order to underscore the fact that the proposals for the Mechanism was a well-thought out process, in response to the most serious crises that the continent experienced. Throughout the process, Member States had indicated, in no uncertain terms, their desire to support the establishment of a comprehensive and permanent system, which would form OAU's institutional response to the challenges posed by the scourge of conflicts in Africa, as against the former practice of deploying ad-hoc or improvised measures. Ultimately, and to the extent possible, we did take cognisance of and accommodated the many genuine concerns of many of our Member States. Consequently, the Mechanism established in Cairo, is an instrument for peace, tailored to reflect the realities, the needs and the constraints of African countries. Its overall purpose, in the final analysis, is to serve as a tool in the hands of Africans to enable them forge a destiny of peace, security and stability.

This brings me to the very positive attention and support extended to the Mechanism during the course of its one year of operationalization. Increasingly, our Member States are conceding a role in resolving conflicts to their Organization within the framework of the Conflict Mechanism. There is now growing acceptance of the fact that the OAU can constructively get involved in promoting political dialogue and help in resolving conflicts. The readiness of Member States to call upon the OAU to facilitate political dialogue

and to observe National elections, is a manifestation of this growing positive disposition of Member States towards the Organization.

Contrary to ill-motivated impressions that the OAU has been absent from many conflict situations in Africa, it might be important to submit that quite a lot has been done by the OAU in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Indeed, even in those cases where the OAU has not directly taken part, it has been instrumental in galvanizing opinion and getting the international community involved. I believe it is appropriate at a forum like this to highlight some of the areas of our involvement and current pre-occupations.

In Rwanda, we worked with the countries of the Region from 1990 when the conflict first broke out, to launch a peace initiative. Apart from supporting the negotiations which led to the signing of the General Peace Treaty of August 1993, we deployed a Neutral Military Observer Group, known as NMOG, which was phased out after the arrival of the United Nations. Indeed, even after the unfortunate events in Rwanda, which was an indictment on all Africans, the OAU continued to play a central role in Rwanda, as we mobilized international action, especially to bring about the deployment of African troops for UNAMIR II. As I speak to you now, the OAU is present in Rwanda, working with the United Nations and the people of that country to consolidate peace, repatriate refugees and reconstruct Rwanda. I personally just returned from a 4-day trip to Rwanda where I held extensive discussions

with all segments of the Rwandese political class. Despite the formidable problems facing the Government, I was favourably impressed by the efforts being made in terms of national reconciliation and reconstruction.

In Burundi, the OAU has remained engaged particularly since the attempted coup in 1993. Essentially, our role in that country has been one of confidence-building and facilitating the process of dialogue and national reconciliation amongst the various groups. Apart from the fact that I have a Special Representative in Burundi, who has been very active in the areas I have already referred to, we have deployed a Team of Civilian and Military Observers, who are active throughout the country and engaged permanently in efforts to build an atmosphere of confidence and help to prevent the outbreak of civil strife and war. In view of the recent deterioration of the situation in Burundi, the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution decided at the Ministerial level in Cairo on 28 March 1995, to despatch an OAU Ministerial Delegation to Burundi. The delegation is expected to be in Burundi next Wednesday, 12 April 1995.

In Liberia, we have consistently supported the ECOWAS initiative to bring peace and stability to that country. Apart from galvanizing international assistance for those efforts, we were instrumental in securing the participation of Uganda and Tanzania in the expanded ECOMOG which facilitated the implementation of the Cotonou Peace Agreement. Currently, the former President of Zimbabwe, Professor Canaan Banana is, on behalf of the OAU, lending his

full weight to the efforts of the Current Chairman of ECOWAS, President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana to bring about a negotiated settlement to the Liberian conflict, in spite of the frustrations and the very unfortunate attitude of the Liberian Factions.

In Somalia, the OAU was instrumental at the very early stages of the conflict, in sensitizing international opinion on the plight of Somalia and in getting the UN Security Council seized of the conflict. I personally have not missed the least opportunity to meet with the leaders and representatives of the various Somali factions whom I have constantly urged to engage on the path of dialogue and genuine national reconciliation.

As you probably know, President Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, was mandated by the OAU Heads of State and Government to co-ordinate OAU efforts in Somalia. Apart from the fresh initiatives being pursued as part of that mandate, we are currently exploring what further role the OAU can play to bring about the establishment of a Transitional Authority following the withdrawal of UNOSOM early last month. This is because even if other peoples turn their backs on Somalia, we, as Africans, cannot afford to be indifferent to the tribulations of the long-suffering people of that country. We therefore remain committed to the search for durable peace and national reconciliation in Somalia.

Here in the Sudan, the OAU has followed very closely and with concern the conflict in Southern Sudan. More recently we had fully supported the mediation efforts of President Babangida of Nigeria when he was the Current Chairman of our Organization. Currently, we fully support and encourage the IGADD Peace efforts led by President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya.

Apart from these high profile conflicts, we have been involved in preventive diplomatic action in many African States aimed at resolving internal problems before they degenerated into major conflicts.

In the Congo, my Special Envoy and renowned International Diplomat, Ambassador Mohammed Sahnoun, was instrumental in defusing tension and sustaining political dialogue between the different political groups in that country which facilitated a peaceful settlement of the crisis and a return to the process of elections. As I am speaking to you, an OAU Team is currently in the Congo to preside over an international committee charged with supervising the legislative elections in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement between the Presidential Coalition of Parties and the Opposition.

Gabon also benefitted from OAU's preventive diplomatic action when my Special Envoy, Ambassador Kemoko Keita of Guinea, mediated during the negotiations which subsequently resulted in the Agreement on a framework for the establishment of a Government, thus averting a major crisis in that country.

The list is endless: from South Africa to Togo, from Angola and Mozambique to the Nigeria/Cameroon conflict, we have engaged in a sustained process of preventive diplomatic action, lowered the level of polarization and violence, as well as facilitated dialogue aimed at securing a political settlement.

Additionally, the OAU has been closely associated with the process of democratization and election monitoring in the Continent as it is increasingly being invited to observe elections in Member States. This is a clear indication of the confidence repositied in the Organization by the Member States.

To date, the OAU has observed elections in Comoros, Zambia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Uganda, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho, Malawi, Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Togo, Tunisia, Guinea, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Benin.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to the experience of the Mechanism at the level of the Secretariat, since its inception, and more specifically to the question of capacity building which is critically vital if we are to live up to the many expectations of and assigned responsibilities from Member States. Since the operationalization of the Mechanism more than eighteen months ago, we have been pre-occupied with the task of capacity building.

Our efforts have largely focused on infrastructural requirements and the development of resources such as a data bank incorporating an early warning capability, on which basis the capacity of the Central Organ to take informed action with regard to incipient or full-blown conflicts can be enhanced.

Earlier on, I made reference to the fact that a Special OAU Peace Fund was established following the adoption of the Mechanism, for the purpose of providing financial resources to sustain OAU's role in conflict management and resolution. One year after its establishment, we remain concerned over the plight of the Peace Fund. Indeed, despite the fact that Member States have extended commendable political and diplomatic support to the Mechanism, such support, unfortunately, is not reflected in the level of financial contributions to the OAU Peace Fund.

It is ironical that apart from seven African countries, the major donations to the Peace Fund have come from extra-Continental sources. Ultimately, it goes without saying that Africa and the Mechanism cannot undertake any new initiatives, or make any meaningful contribution to ending conflicts without the preparedness of Member States to commit adequate resources, not only at the level of the national governments, but also by a cross section of the African business community and the entire people of the Continent, who have a strong vested interest in the ending of the unnecessary and unfortunate conflicts now raging in the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

Peace is a vital prerequisite for the development of any society. There are many areas in Africa today, where societies are yearning for peace, security and stability for their very survival. Much of our Continent is in turmoil today; conflicts are still raging, new and complex ones which continue to defy human logic are erupting. Statistics of the protracted ethnic and internal conflicts in some parts of our Continent provide a grim portrait.

War and conflicts in Africa have exacerbated the following problems:

- unprecedented loss of civilian lives especially women and children who remain the vast majority of the victims; and
- the massive displacement of our active population which account for the greatest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world. A worrisome and woefully neglected feature of this pattern is the unusually large proportion of widows and orphans among the displaced as the case of Rwanda proved.

There is also ecological degradation which exacerbates the process of desertification. Movement of people and resettlement on fragile lands as in Zaire and Tanzania are further threatening an already precarious

ecological balance, which pressure further intensifies competition over resources. Additionally, our human and economic resources are being squandered. There is the emergence of a war ethic in Africa, in which our people become accustomed to making or coping with war, rather than creating peace or engaging in productive activities. Infrastructures, such as hospitals, schools, roads, bridges and communication networks, which took decades to build, are being wantonly destroyed. Most of our talented and skilled people are forced into exile in foreign lands and we end up with the disintegration of the social fabric and family structures which for decades, provided cultural roots and preserved Africa's rich heritage. With this diminution of our indigenous culture, our people are now becoming vulnerable to cultural substitutes such as militarism, warlordism, political ethnic, or other forms of extremism.

We believe that this development and the phenomenon of conflicts on the Continent are an aberration capable of being reversed, through a better understanding of their root causes, the localization of the capacity to ensure the development of mediation competence before conflicts degenerate into violence. Whereas in the past, one could state that Africa's efforts in this regard lacked consistency, continuity and, in some cases, the impartiality that goes with a deeper understanding of the problems, the establishment of a Mechanism is a clear manifestation if any was needed, that the OAU has the mandate and credibility to make some modest contribution to the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa and minimize the degree of instability, destruction and loss of lives, that is increasingly becoming the legacy of our

time. As we pursue this mandate, we must also strive to inculcate and/or strengthen the culture of tolerance in our societies.

Finally, it is important to point out that the establishment of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Resolution has not in any way diminished the role of the United Nations in Africa. Indeed, the moral and universal responsibility of the United Nations, was recognized and underscored by the Cairo Declaration. It still remains the supreme universal body which has overall responsibility for international peace and security.

We, at the OAU, believe in the concept of universality especially when dealing with the United Nations. It cannot, of course, be otherwise for after all, our Member States are also Member States of the United Nations and there is a clear complementarity between the work of the OAU and that of the United Nations. However, we believe that it is the strong expectation of our Member States that the OAU provide leadership for Continental efforts in conflict management. That responsibility, we shall not abdicate.