



**Organization of African Unity**

**Statement by the Secretary General  
of the Organization of African Unity at the  
National Summit on Africa  
Washington, D.C. 16 – 20 February 2000**

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**Mr. Chairman,**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Honourable Members of Congress,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to participate at this summit that demonstrates a determination of the peoples of the United States of America and the peoples of Africa to consolidate their historical bond of friendship and partnership. I would like to congratulate the organizers of this important event for their initiative and for involving the Organization of African Unity throughout the preparatory processes leading to this event.

I wish at the very outset to pay particular tribute to President Clinton for the various initiatives associated with Africa that have been undertaken during his administration.

We recall, for example, the 1994 White House Conference on Africa, and the United States – Africa Ministerial Conference held here in Washington, in 1999, where the senior leadership of Africa met with their counterparts, to forge a partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We further recall, with fond memories, your historic visit to Africa in 1998.

We have been following with keen interest the deliberations in the organs of governance of this country and among its various constituencies aimed at elaborating a legal instrument that may provide a framework for the promotion of trade and investment, between Africa and the United

States. Indeed, the dialogue that was generated by the Growth and Opportunity Act has raised the level of sensitivity about Africa's concerns.

We have also been encouraged by the initiative taken to devote the American Presidency of the United Nations Security Council during the month of January this year to issues that concern Africa. It is our hope that after the candid exchange of views and the commitments made during those sessions, concrete steps will be taken to rectify the distortions and imbalances that have undermined Africa's efforts at promoting peace, stability, growth, and human development.

This national Summit is convened at a critical juncture in Africa's development. The Continent enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century having succeeded to end colonialism and apartheid, and vigorously pursuing economic development and social transformation. While facing the challenge of globalization, particularly its new demands in terms of efficiency and competitiveness, Africa still has to remain preoccupied with the provision of basic economic and social needs for her people. In meeting this dual challenge, we have given the highest priority of our development to increasing economic growth by mobilizing all factors of production, maintaining a conducive institutional and policy framework, and promoting cooperation and integration among our countries.

During the past decade and a half, African States have undertaken a number of bold, and sometimes painful reform measures aimed at promoting economic development. At the same time, important initiatives have been carried out to strengthen economic cooperation and integration continentally and at the regional level. The historic decision made by the African Heads of State and Government at Sirte on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1999, to create an African Union by 2001 underscores this resolve to consolidate our collective unity in confronting the challenges of development.

In the quest to promote economic development, we are fully aware that the sustainability and success of all our endeavours are critically dependent on the maintenance of peace, stability and security within our respective nations and between them. We have experienced with great horror, not only of how conflict and insecurity destroy life and create excruciating suffering to the people, but equally disturbing is that they

divert precious development resources, erode confidence for investment, and generally undermine development.

We also realize that the low level of economic development and the undeveloped nature of institutions of governance have made Africa to be vulnerable to the recurrence of conflicts and instability triggered by various factors. Indeed, during the past decade, the continent has experienced more than its fair share of violent conflicts which impeded our development.

Africa has, nevertheless, assumed its responsibility in efforts aimed at bringing to an end the scourge of conflicts. With a determined resolve and using the institutional mechanisms that have been put in place, Africans at various levels, individually and collectively have been in the frontline in mediation efforts, in peace enforcement, and in extending humanitarian assistance within the Continent.

It is important to underline that the pursuit of peace is not limited to preventing or resolving conflicts. Africa remains mindful of the critical importance of building institutions of democratization and popular participation not only as a fundamental right of the African peoples, but also to provide a basis of resolving differences in an organized and peaceful manner.

Africa acknowledges its responsibilities and is making an earnest effort at resolving many of its problems. The Continent will continue to deploy vigorous and sustained efforts at promoting socio-economic development. The achievement of this objective calls for a number of measures, including effective programmes at poverty eradication, a solution to the Continent's crushing debt burden, and putting an end to Africa's marginalization in the global economy.

I should hasten to point out that the African people and their governments accept the imperative of assuming leadership in resolving African problems. This, however, should not imply that Africa's concerns are restrictively an African affair. Our Continent is part of the global village and it needs to be treated with the same sense of urgency and gravity as an integral part of the world.

We are getting a disturbing impression that there is a degree of imbalance and double standards on the part of some sections of the international community in addressing African problems. Little urgency is given to our problems, and when assistance is rendered, it is relatively too little and often delayed. This is in remarkable contrast to how other societies are treated in this regard.

The process for promoting peace and development in Africa is quite challenging. However, we are determined to overcome this challenge. In this context, a partnership between the people of the United States and Africa can provide a tremendous impetus.

The conditions and rationale have always existed for the African people and the people of the United States to maintain a firmer bond of friendship, cooperation and partnership. There are compelling social-cultural, economic and political reasons for our two societies to be much closer and to generate more mutual benefits than what currently prevails. One wonders as to why this potential has not been actualized during all these years?

In reflecting on this question, I am reminded of a conversation I had a few years ago in Addis Ababa with a prominent and very sympathetic member of the American Senate. He bluntly told me, that from his electoral constituency he is consistently presented with issues concerning many parts of the world but hardly any one raised African issues.

It thus, boils down to the fact that Africa lacks a strong constituency in the United States. The continent has for a long time failed to attract the proper attention in the life, politics, and economic vision of the American people. In fact, Africa has for many years been only a media item of a passing glimpse, particularly used in highlighting a negative and stereotype image. And this despite the commendable efforts of some organizations and many individuals of good will towards Africa.

I believe that this National Summit and how it evolved is a serious attempt to redress this situation. We face a challenge of building a strong constituency for Africa among the people of the United States. It is partly the challenge of resuscitating the constituency that worked with Africa in

the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. It is the challenge of supporting and expanding the efforts of the individuals and a few foundations that have been striving to keep alive the African agenda in this country. It is the challenge of increasing sensitization and creating a better understanding about the continent and its opportunity, and more importantly about what Africa is doing on its own to address its concerns. In a country where a significant number of its population are people of African descent, and where tens of thousands of Americans have directly interacted with so many friends and people of goodwill towards our Continent, this challenge is not insurmountable. Evidently, the challenge is to both Americans and Africans alike.

Before concluding, I would like once again to recognize the singular contribution made by President Clinton and his Administration in giving proper focus on the importance and potential of our Continent. His personal efforts and commitment have been a source of inspiration. It is our hope that future administrations in this country will sustain these efforts.

A strong, stable and prosperous Africa at peace with itself, and with its enormous wealth and resources is good news not only for the Continent but also for its partners. I am confident that this National Summit will make its positive contribution towards this goal.

I thank you.