



27

ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE BY THE OAU SECRETARY GENERAL  
H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Excellencies,

My Dear Fellow Africans,

Once again, in a few hours, we shall witness the end of another year and the commencement of a New Year. It is traditional, at this time of the year, for people to take stock of the past, in order to look up to the future. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to utilise this singular occasion, when I have the honour to address the people of Africa, to highlight a few of the major topical issues that confront our continent, in the hope that these concerns will be given adequate emphasis in the resolutions you will be making for 1993.

This is nothing new to the people of Africa who, since the beginning of the Eighties have been yearning for some good news. For more than a decade the people of Africa have not only consistently been told tales of woes, but have actually lived through and experienced the pains and agonies of life. On each occasion, we proclaim our determination to see our continent divested of the evils that plague her; we pledge and renew our commitment to forge closer unity between our states and people. And yet, notwithstanding our best efforts, the continent continues to slide into more complex political and economic problems. The experts proclaimed the Eighties as a lost decade. The beginnings of the Nineties have not given us much hope.

The Year 1992 has been particularly a very difficult year for Africa. It has been a year of unmitigated disaster in terms of conflicts, drought and famine and a general socio-economic decline. 1992 however, also witnessed an expansion of the frontiers of democracy in some parts of the continent.

Africa has known conflicts; conflicts between states and conflicts within states. Today, it is civil war that threatens the very fabric of our states and 1992 will forever be remembered for a combination of civil war and famine which produced such unprecedented horrors and carnage. The tragedy in Somalia, the wars in Liberia and Rwanda and the internecine conflict in the Sudan all hit international headlines. New areas of tension also emerged following the democratization process. Africa at the end of 1992 was a continent beset with conflicts and famine or simply a continent in profound crisis.

We are all witnesses to the unnerving spectacle of walking human skeletons on Television. The images of babies and adults, their bodies reduced to bare and brittle bones by starvation, as well as thousands more who have died from hunger, evoke feelings of anguish and revulsion. Such a feeling is immediately transformed into righteous anger when armed bandits and others divert for their own use, food and medicines that the international community had donated for use by the starving people. For many months, the world watched this spectacle with apparent helplessness. It soon became clear that for the humanitarian effort to succeed, it needed to be buttressed by other measures to diffuse the terrible security situation. We all heaved a sigh of relief when the United Nations was able to find the courage and the determination to mount an operation to ensure that food and medicines get to those who need them most.

The problem in Somalia is humanitarian; it is also a security problem; but above all, it is a political problem. Solution to one without a corresponding action on the others renders the efforts futile. This is why we have called for a simultaneous and comprehensive approach at finding a lasting solution to the problem in Somalia.

As the struggle to alleviate the intolerable condition in Somalia continues, I wish to place on record the appreciation of the OAU to all those countries, governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals who have contributed and continue to contribute to the humanitarian effort in Somalia. I am also encouraged to note that following our repeated appeals for assistance, a number of our member States have responded positively and contributed food, medicines, personnel and equipment. But more needs to be done within Africa to demonstrate in concrete terms that we care about the plight of our brothers and sisters in Somalia and that we are willing to share the little that we have. In the titanic struggle in Somalia and elsewhere, let it not be said that the people of Africa failed to support their own.

The tragic situation in Somalia in particular and in other areas have exposed the OAU to the full glare of international scrutiny and I must admit we have not been able to rise to the general expectation. There are therefore useful lessons for us to draw. The first lesson is that the conflicts in Africa have exposed the weakness of the OAU in terms of its institutions and capacities. The absence of a permanent mechanism within the OAU for conflict management and resolution, makes it extremely difficult for the Organization to respond effectively and promptly to any crisis situation. The issue has been a subject for discussion for sometime. But I think it is time Africa came to terms with reality and set to rights what has been a painful omission.

The second lesson to be drawn is that where there is determination, and in spite of scarce resources, something concrete and tangible can be done. The situation in Liberia is a case in point. The despatch of a Peace Keeping Force to Liberia by the Leaders of ECOWAS represents the finest hour for Africa in its efforts to maintain peace and security on the continent. There have been problems and there would have been problems irrespective of who might have gone in. This is why

the OAU fully supports the initiatives of ECOWAS Peace Plan. OAU support and assistance must go to complement the efforts of ECOWAS. And this is what we request of all others.

The case of Rwanda presents a different picture. The OAU is fully involved because the parties to the conflict as well as the neighbouring countries want the conflict to be resolved under the auspices of the OAU. The OAU has a Military Observer Team in place. I must mention with appreciation the fact that the Governments of the USA, France, Germany and Belgium have provided logistical and other support to the OAU. With all the factors mentioned above, especially the determination of the Government of Rwanda and the the Rwanda Patriotic Front to ensure success, progress is being made in the Negotiations in Arusha under the chairmanship of Tanzania as the facilitator. We will persevere in our efforts to step up the pace of progress in the coming year with the aim of having the two parties sign a general peace agreement that would bring lasting peace as well as a democratic dispensation to Rwanda.

In Angola and Mozambique, after protracted civil wars, Peace Accords have been signed to usher in an era of peace and security. We heartily welcomed these developments and urged all the parties involved to scrupulously observe the terms of the Accord so that peace would finally come to the suffering people of the two countries.

In Angola, the peace process reached the final phase when elections were held in September 1992. The international observers who monitored the elections were satisfied that the elections were generally free and fair. The results however, have been contested by UNITA. This has provoked a serious political crisis which has thrown the country back on a collision course, exerted enormous stress on the fragile peace and is threatening to plunge the country into another senseless blood-bath. Many efforts at different levels are being made to diffuse the tense situation. The Organization of African Unity has deployed sustained efforts aimed at promoting dialogue and national reconciliation in Angola. A high level OAU delegation has just returned from Angola where it held wide-ranging consultations with the various political parties and forces in its effort to help

the Angolan people and encourage them to seek the path of peace and national reconciliation. It is our sincere hope that our brothers and sisters in Angola, in spite of whatever differences exist, will do all that is possible to give peace a chance. The people of Angola who endured the extreme hardships of protracted civil strife deserve that peace more than any thing else.

In Mozambique where the provisions of the Accord are now going to be implemented, we urge the parties to avoid all pitfalls and situations that might impair the democratic process. The people of Mozambique demand peace and no one should deny them that right. We also urge the international community to provide the necessary assistance in the implementation of the Peace Accords.

In the Western Sahara, we have observed with frustration the delays in the implementation of the peace plan and the holding of a free and fair referendum for the people of Western Sahara. It is again our fervent hope that the obstacles to the implementation of the peace plan will be removed to pave the way for a lasting and peaceful solution to the problem and the creation of an atmosphere of peace and stability in that region of our continent.

Connected with the incidence of conflicts, is the problem of refugees and displaced persons. This is not to say that conflicts are the only cause for the refugee situation in Africa. There are other root causes. But conflicts have exacerbated the refugee situation to the extent that today we have more than 6 million refugees and 12 million displaced persons. As a result of extreme privation, agony and the untold human suffering, the need for humanitarian assistance continues to increase. We are grateful to all those who have helped and continue to help in alleviating the plight of our unfortunate brothers and sisters. For a lasting solution to this problem, it is our confident expectation that the on-going democratization process in Africa, the end to Apartheid and our resolve to manage conflicts will greatly reduce the scale of the refugee problem if not eliminate it altogether.

In South Africa, the year 1992 was ushered in with a great deal of optimism because the CODESA process had just commenced in December 1991. But the optimism soon began to evaporate as CODESA ran into deadlock and violence gathered such a momentum as had never before been seen in South Africa. In short, there has been no progress in terms of forward movement. It is in this connection that we urge the parties to resolve the outstanding differences as early as possible to enable the political process move forward without further delays.

The all important question of unity among the oppressed people in South Africa received a severe jolt in 1992, partly because of the violence and partly because of the differences in strategies. As we enter the new year, we urge our brothers and sisters to exert maximum effort to narrow their differences in order to ensure that the pace of progress is not diminished. The OAU now has observers in South Africa to assist in efforts to end violence and also contribute in any way possible to the process of negotiations.

Perhaps the singular positive development on the continent in 1992 is the inexorable march to democracy. Presidential and Parliamentary Elections were held in many African countries and the OAU was invited to observe many of them. Many more countries will be having elections next year. From our assessment so far, we can make the following observations:

- (i) That the democratic process is irreversible because it is essentially internally generated;
- (ii) For it to succeed however, it must take the concrete realities of our societies into account. In other words, the structures we erect must be based on the cultural values of our peoples;
- (iii) That conditions in each country should not be used as an excuse to deny the application of fundamental concepts and principles as well as basic rights and freedoms which are universal.

- (iv) The need for sustained civic education and the building of a democratic culture which will be an insurance against any attempt at instability and also make it easier for losing parties to accept the verdict of the people. This point is particularly important because the success of the democratic process depends on it. Already a few of the countries are being seriously threatened with post-election civil strife. Above all we must inculcate and strengthen the culture of tolerance in our societies.

On the economic plane, 1992, according to experts, had not been the year for the turn-around as expected, and the downward slide has continued. We have moved from crisis to crisis since the 1980s. It is difficult to know what lies beyond the present series of crisis.

In 1992, our production capacity in both agriculture and industry either declined or stagnated. Structural Adjustment Programmes are dismantling production structures and social services, and replacement structures are facing serious human, organizational and material resources shortages and constraints leading to considerable dislocation and decline. The result is high unemployment, lack of new investment and a gross distortion of income distribution. The internal income distribution gap between the rich and poor in our continent is growing at a very high rate.

Social services such as education and health have become more and more inaccessible to the majority of the African population. Inflation in African countries is also another serious problem contributing to the serious decline in domestic saving and investment.

On the external front, debt repayment has constituted the single most important constraint on Africa's development. Africa expatriates every year more than 1/3 of its total export earnings to pay for the interest on debt. Ironically, in spite of this huge sacrifice Africa's debt keeps growing every year not as a result of new borrowing but rather as a result of the capitalization of interest due which our countries cannot pay. Our debt now stands close to US\$300 billion. Obviously, this situation cannot be sustained if we are to have any hope for any growth and development.



On the other hand, the external assistance to Africa has not been commensurate with the legitimate expectations of our people despite the commitment made repeatedly by the international community to support Africa's development efforts. For instance, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa, in real terms, has at best, remained the same in the last three years. The international community did not redeem its commitment to support the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERED).

Essentially, there are four factors pulling Africa down. These are conflicts, natural disasters, external as well as what can be considered internal factors. Of the four, Africa has control over two, conflicts and the internal factor; the other two it has no control over. I have already discussed the issue of conflict and what has to be done to manage it. If by the internal factor is meant the inadequate application of the prescriptions of structural adjustment of the International Monetary Fund, then I submit the observation is uninformed. It is uninformed because against all the dire social and political consequences of the adjustment programme, member States have spared no effort in implementing the adjustment programme. However, it must be pointed out that it would be unwise to push us any further beyond what is bearable. Already the unemployment figures in our countries are reaching alarming proportions. Our sick and needy cannot go to the hospitals because of the high cost and the same high cost is becoming an obstacle to the formal education and training of our people.

If by the 'internal factor' on the other hand is meant the transformation of our dependent economies into self-sustaining and viable entities based on collective self-reliance, then Africa has a long way to go. All the analysis has been made and options provided. There is a general consensus that the economic fortunes or otherwise of Africa depend essentially on the Africans themselves. And the only way to salvation for Africa is through a speedy integration of the continent. This is nothing new. Indeed some of our founding fathers had arrived at the same conclusions long before the OAU was formed. The idea seemed

utopian. But even at a time when it had become abundantly clear that salvation lies in the integration of the continent and we accordingly adopted the Treaty for the African Economic Community in Abuja in 1991, its ratification has been somewhat slow. This, unfortunately shows that there is somehow a lack of appreciation of the gravity of the situation facing Africa. One would have expected the Treaty to have been attended to with a sense of dire urgency. Further delays for the Community to come into force will only compound the problems facing Africa. The next few months of 1993 should see the coming into force of the Treaty. And the People of Africa have a role to play in this.

True, natural disasters are beyond human control. To a certain extent yes. But it is equally true that drought and famine can be managed in order to minimize their impact. We are all witness to the unprecedented drought and famine in Southern Africa, a region hitherto unknown for such disasters and was in fact a net exporter of food. This in addition to the recurrent situation of drought and famine in other regions of the continent especially in the Horn of Africa and in the Sahel, highlights the acute nature of the problem which needs to be seriously addressed. It also underscores the need for us to intensify our efforts at planning and co-ordination, so that necessary arrangements and measures are taken both at national, regional and continental levels in order to respond swiftly to situations of food shortage or famine.

We now turn to the external factor which implies the resource flows from the developed countries to Africa, fair and adequate prices for our commodities and the excruciating debt problem, to mention only a few. It is again true to say that Africa has no control over these factors. And whether Africa has the necessary leverage to ensure that its concerns are taken into account is a matter of great doubt. We only have to look at the continuing falling prices for our commodities, the levity with which they have treated Africa's plea for an international

conference on the debt question. But Africa can build that leverage which will make others take its concerns into account. We have to create the enabling environment. To do that means doing our homework in the first place. What I am saying is simply this; that Africa has the potential to secure better attention in order to forge a meaningful partnership with the rest of the world.

Having said this about ourselves, we must also bring to the attention of the developed world in particular that the neglect of the legitimate concerns of Africa is neither in their interest nor in the interest of peace and security. We have observed that the various commitments they have made in support of our efforts are yet to be translated into action. We admit they also have their problems. So also do we assert that the problems of Africa are not exclusively our own. Above all, Africa is also a part of the world that deserves equal attention. The worth of the emerging world order will be measured by the extent to which it is responsive to the needs and plights of its constituent parts. In this respect, it is my most fervent hope that there shall be more concrete and determined efforts by the developed countries in particular and the international community in general in support of Africa's efforts for development within the context of an initiative of global and concerted approach.

Excellencies,  
Fellow Africans,

There are many issues I should have covered but chose to limit myself only to those I consider to be priority of priorities in the hope that they receive the urgent attention they deserve.

From the problems of conflicts to the problems of development, the people of Africa should no longer be mere spectators. This is the essence of the new freedom blowing through the length and breadth of the continent. This era of participatory democracy should see the involvement of the peoples of Africa in issues affecting the destiny of Africa.

The difficulties we are facing should not make us lose hope, but should rather make us redouble our efforts and strengthen our resolve. Our continent is rich in natural resources and the creative energies of its people. We believe, given the right environment and the co-operation and understanding of our partners, our people are capable of reversing the current economic decline. The key to this is the perseverance of our nations and people to pursue economic policies that will ensure our long-term objective of collective self-reliance for which we have laid the foundation at both the regional and continental levels.

The New Year offers us the occasion for solemn and sober reflection on all the multitude of problems facing the continent and to resolve, with greater determination, to strive relentlessly for the projection and enhancement of the African Personality by:

- (i) Elimination of conflicts through prompt and effective management and resolution of all such conflicts;
- (ii) Elimination of poverty, drought and famine disease and ignorance within the framework of the African Economic Community.

This is the challenge. This noble goal cannot be attained by individual Leaders and States, but by the collective effort of all our Leaders and People, men and women, students and intellectuals, boys and girls, workers and farmers, governmental and non-governmental organizations, united by a common desire and guided by history, to be our own master in our own house. This is the historic Mission bequeathed to us by the Founding Fathers whose vision should continue to inspire us. We resolve once more to make the necessary sacrifice for the progress and dignity of the African.

Finally, as the year 1993 coincides with the Thirtieth Anniversary of the OAU, we should re-dedicate ourselves to the vigorous pursuit of those lofty aims of Pan-Africanism that animated and continue to animate the peoples of Africa. It is also my most fervent hope that the coming year will witness greater solidarity between and among the African countries and peoples as well as a better climate of understanding and solidarity of the international community with Africa.

I wish to seize this occasion to appeal to my fellow African brothers and sisters to demonstrate the spirit of African brotherhood so that together we can forge ahead in peace and unity.

I wish you all, a Happy New Year.

I thank you.