



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE JOKOMO YAMATA LIBRARY
AT THE AFRICA UNIVERSITY**

MUTARE, ZIMBABWE

31 MARCH 2001

Mr. Chancellor, Bishop Emilio de Carvalho

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Professor Rukudzo Murapa

Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials of the Government of Zimbabwe

Your Excellencies High Commissioners, Ambassadors and other Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Members of the University Community

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you at this occasion of the official opening of a new library. I wish to convey my appreciation to the Vice Chancellor of Africa University, Professor Rukudzo Murapa, for extending an invitation that has provided me and my delegation the opportunity of experiencing the scenic splendor of the Eastern Highland region of Zimbabwe and the beauty of Africa University campus. More significantly, on arrival at this campus one is struck by the inspiring blend of an enthusiastic academic community, a perfect rural setting, and an institution committed to an important mission. The outcome of this unique constellation evokes nothing but hope and optimism for Africa University and for the people of this Continent as a whole.

I would like to convey my gratitude to the staff and students of this University for the cordial reception we have received since our arrival in Mutare. I wish to congratulate the community around here as well the friends and partners of Africa University for the remarkable achievements that have been made in less than a decade since the founding of this institution. The success gained is significant both for the development of the University and its community, and also in reaffirming the viability of providing higher education in Africa through the non-public system.

I have been impressed by the determination to maintain and consolidate the Pan-African character of this institution, an aspect which is projected not only in the name of the University, but more importantly in the configuration of its community and the content of its programs and cultural life. Indeed, the model session of the United Nations Security Council that was part of this ceremony is a further demonstration of the broader scope of concerns and preoccupations of the academic community here. It is also a manifestation of adeptness of

balancing global and the local dynamics in equipping the future generation of our Continent.

Mr. Chancellor
Honourable Ministers
Ladies and Gentlemen

Both the vision and mission statements of this University underline the centrality of equipping the African people with the requisite capacities for surmounting the challenges facing them. You have stated in your Vision Statement - and I quote:

"The vision of Africa University is improved quality of life, peace and prosperity for the peoples of Africa through quality higher education that includes teaching, research, community service and leadership development."

Similarly, the Mission Statement reads as follows:

"The mission of Africa University is to provide quality education within a Pan-African context through which persons can acquire general and professional knowledge and skills, grow in spiritual maturity, develop sound moral values, ethics and leadership qualities."

You have thus committed yourselves to pursuing your endeavours within a context of 'Pan-Africanism', and you have also identified the 'Peoples of Africa' to be at the focal centre. I cannot but commend and support such a noble articulation of the role of a University. On my part, as a way of contributing to your mission, I find it appropriate to devote my address this afternoon, to the challenges facing Africa as we enter the new century and the new millennium and the critical importance of human resource development. As I reflect on the challenges and our reaction to them, I shall strive to comment also on the role of the African University in contributing to the Continental agenda.

Undoubtedly, Africa enters the 21st Century relatively better endowed than it was when it entered the previous century. This time, it is doing so unencumbered by the vagaries of colonial rule, and after it has obliterated the despicable system of apartheid in which the worth of a person was determined by the pigmentation of one's skin, and having much larger nation-states. In the broader context, Africa finds itself in the new century amidst a changing global system which, unlike the old one, offers some opportunities for sustainable development even though it is also associated with severe threats. The dynamics of this new system impose on our countries the necessity of closer association so as to

orphaned by AIDS are in Africa, where 40-70% of all beds in big cities hospitals are occupied by HIV patients in most severely affected countries.

All these devastating encumbrances coupled with the lack of capacities for managing natural disasters as well as the need to transform the institutions of governance and to redress past inequities, have constituted formidable challenges for our Continent as it enters the new century and the new millennium. Over the past two decades concerted efforts have been deployed at various levels to find means and ways that can enhance the collective capacity of African people in surmounting these challenges. African Governments have had to take bold and radical measures, some of which were quite painful, in order to deal with the difficult situation.

At the Continental level, there has been a strong determination to promote structures and institutions that can foster closer unity and cooperation among African countries. As you may have learnt recently, at the 5th Extra-Ordinary Assembly of Heads of State and Government which took place in Sirte, Libya early this month, a process that was initiated on 9.9.99 reached a major milestone with the declaration of the establishment of the African Union by the unanimous will of Member States. The legal requirements for the Union will be completed upon the deposit of the 36th instrument of ratification of its Constitutive Act. As a testimony to the commitment of African countries to achieve this ideal that has been desired for so long, as of today, all 53 Member States of the OAU have signed the Constitutive Act and 33 out of the required 36 countries have ratified it.

Underlying all these endeavours to surmount the challenges confronting our societies is the firm belief that the people are central to the development of this Continent. Not only are they the basis for change and development, but they are also the agents of their own transformation and for shaping their destiny. It is in this context that I find the vision and mission statements of your University to be very important and pertinent in the pursuit of the Continental agenda.

Your vision and mission statements underline the critical importance of equipping the African people with sufficient capacities for becoming an effective force for self transformation. They underscore the vital importance of developing human resources, particularly through higher education in surmounting obtaining challenges and in attaining a better life for African people.

I fully share your position that now more than ever, education, and particularly higher education, needs to be given a deserving attention as

a leading instrument for change. This is an era when knowledge, information and communication systems have become driving factors for global development. We find ourselves at a time of profound scientific and technological changes in the world. It is a time when a digital divide is emerging that relegates our people to the backwaters of development.

To overcome these challenges we need to deploy strategically the sector of higher education. Institutions of higher learning like the Africa University need to play an important role in the pursuit of the national and continental agenda for development. They are the only agencies in our societies which have the critical mass of knowledge, information and expertise. Having such endowments obliges the universities to be in the vanguard of the quest for change in our Continent. As they undertake the functions of teaching, research, consultancy and public service, the universities have to contribute towards overcoming the prevailing challenges and accelerating the development of African people.

African institutions of higher learning cannot afford to remain simply facilities that produce commodities for sale in the labour market. Historically, the role of universities has been nobler than that. They have always been valuable institutions of societies rather than only structures of the market place. In this respect, and in the context of Africa today, institutions of higher learning need to be concerned with ways and means of deploying resources of our continent for the betterment of our people, and also for increasing productivity.

In their quest for both basic and applied knowledge, institutions of higher learning in Africa have to address themselves to the political and socio-economic problems confronting the Continent. They need to develop tools and mechanisms that would contribute to conflict resolution, to building a culture of peace and enhancing institutions and practices of good governance and the respect for human rights. They need to engage in the efforts to contain the spread of HIV-AIDS and seek for ways of eradicating this scourge.

Institutions of higher learning have to work towards enhancing Africa's capacities for managing man-made as well as natural disasters. On this aspect, University experts should take up the challenge of developing early warning systems that could serve as mechanisms of predicting and pre-empting disasters. In the same vein, the African university should endeavour to promote cooperation and integration in the Continent.

In the process of contributing towards addressing these challenges, the institutions of higher learning have to contribute, directly and indirectly towards the growth in our societies of an ethical and moral

culture, as well as an attitudinal disposition among the citizenry that is commensurate with the tasks at hand.

This is indeed a tall order. The extent to which higher education in our Continent can effectively serve as a dynamic force for development can go a long way in determining the success of our Continental endeavours. At this point, however, all one can definitely say, is that the increasing scope of higher education calls for new partnerships, nationally and at a continental level, in the provision and management of this sector.

Experience in the post-independence period has demonstrated that the public sector, on its own, does not have the capacity to provide sufficient higher education for meeting the challenges that we are confronting. The necessity for other spheres of society, such as private and civic sectors, to be encouraged and assisted in providing higher education cannot be overstated. Your own example here has demonstrated that it is possible in Africa for the non-public sector to run a university successfully. This continent needs more such institutions because they increase our capacity for self-emancipation.

In terms of contributing to the Continental agenda, it is important for the university in Africa to maintain a broader trans-national perspective in its programmes and activities. The University curriculum has to encompass subjects and issues that transcend the borders of a particular country. Indeed, it has not been uncommon lately for a student to graduate without having sufficient familiarity with developments in the neighbouring country. Regional studies, multi-disciplinary approaches, and comparative analysis, both in social and physical sciences, has been losing way to narrow and sometimes parochial perspectives, all in the name of strict specialization. One consequence of this approach is that institutions of higher learning tend to lose the African perspective. And when this is lost at the higher level, very little should be expected at primary, secondary and vocational levels.

Apart from the programmes and perspectives, the necessary infrastructure for nurturing a Continental consciousness needs to be cultivated. Institutions of higher learning have to develop a culture of networking at all levels. Faculty, students and research teams have to build relations with partners across the Continent and exchange knowledge and experiences. Apart from the economies of scale there are immense other benefits in building institutional linkages in higher education. Networking, sharing and exchange can assist in overcoming some of the existing bottlenecks in sustaining our Universities. At the same time, the consolidation of regional and continental institutional

affinities that are fostered by such linkages contribute to the growth of a Pan-African consciousness that we are all striving to build in the Continent. We do have memorable experiences of joint universities in various parts of our Continent. They produced some of our leaders and best experts in the Continent.

Linkages need to be created with communities, industry, and enterprises that are near and far. After all, we are living at an era where time and space are no longer considered to be limiting factors in communication.

In order to enhance networking and cooperation among institutions, strategic decisions have to be made in terms of building the necessary infrastructure for a Pan-African and global perspective. One facility that is critical for accomplishing this, is the library.

The library, and indeed a proper library, is one infrastructural element that is of vital importance in the development of a deeper insight and a broader perspective of development. Indeed, it is for this reason that I found it important to come here and join you at today's occasion. I firmly believe that much as you are located here in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, near the town of Mutare, this Jakomo Yamada Library, given appropriate facilities, can serve as an important tool for enabling this University harness the Continental and global knowledge in order to equip students and faculty of Africa University so that they can contribute to the tasks at hand. Equally so, those of us who are in other parts of the Continent can be able to share some of your reflections and discoveries that you will keep in custody at this facility and disseminate accordingly.

May I, at this juncture, congratulate all those who have contributed to the establishment of this library. I am confident that it will serve as an important tool for the realization of the vision and mission of Africa University. Indeed, I am greatly impressed by the partnerships so far developed in the process of establishing this Pan-African institution. On behalf of the Organization of African Unity, I wish to commend those that are doing everything possible to make the dream of building a university that can serve the whole of Africa. This is an outstanding example of deploying devotion, commitment and partnership in realizing our collective ideals. It is an example that other denominations and other communities can emulate to advance our joint endeavours.

To the United Methodist Church, and also to all those who have been generously supporting Africa University, I wish to assure you that you have not only mobilized cash and kind to building a university, but equally significant you are involved in a process of building a

consolidating relationships across continents and among communities and societies for benefiting African People as a whole. I encourage you to sustain this noble ideal.

I thank you all.