



PRESS RELEASE

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P. O. BOX 3243
Tel. (251-1) 51 77 00 Fax: (251 1) 51 12 99
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SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REMARKS
ON RECEIVING ALGERIA'S HIGHEST DECORATION

At a ceremony held on 18 April 2001 at the Club des Pins in Algiers, the OAU Secretary-General, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, was awarded Algeria's highest decoration – l'Ordre El-Athir – by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in recognition of his service to the Continent.

The ceremony which took place immediately after the adjournment of the Opening Ceremony of the 12th Ministerial Meeting of the Standing Commission on Afro-Arab Cooperation, was attended by Algerian dignitaries including the President of the Senate, the President of the National Assembly, the Head of Government, Ministers, Officials and Members of the Diplomatic Corps. Also present were Ministers, Ambassadors and other Officials participating in the Standing Commission.

Upon receiving the decoration, the Secretary-General made the following remarks:

"Excellency President Abdelaziz Bouteflika
Honourable Ministers
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this stage of my life that the Almighty has blessed me to attain, I have had various moments of jubilation and achievement. Very few of these have been so moving and so touching than the honour that is being bestowed on me today.

For me this honour has a special meaning considering the history of this country which is an epitome of Africa's resistance and resilience against

oppression, humiliation and injustice. I feel humbled by this honour coming from a country of 1.5 million martyrs, a people who has demonstrated a high degree of commitment and determination in political and practical terms in the struggle for the regaining the dignity of the African peoples. Indeed, Algeria continues to be a shining and inspiring example for all of us.

I am also extremely moved by this honour because I am being awarded by a distinguished African and Arab leader – a freedom fighter, a consummate diplomat of great accomplishment and a statesman. I have had the privilege of working with President Bouteflika for many years. Mr. President, We have always respected and admired your sense of integrity and the commitment to the causes of the Algerian people and of your devotion and dedication to the cause of our peoples in the Continent as a whole.

I vividly recall your historic role at the United Nations where you distinguished yourself as a spokesperson for justice and fairness. How can we ever forget the memorable ruling you gave as President of the United Nations General Assembly which effectively banned the participation of the delegate of Apartheid South Africa from the General Assembly proceedings and the other consequences of that action? And since assuming leadership of the Algerian people, you have demonstrated commitment to the service not only of Algerians but for Africa as a whole.

Indeed it was because of his sense of dedication, devotion and responsibility that you exhibited while presiding as the Current Chairman of the OAU last year, that Africa was eventually rewarded with the accomplishment of the deeply-desired peace in the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Mr. President, I take this honour not simply to be a personal achievement. I believe it is also a further demonstration of Algeria's commitment to the Organization of African Unity and to the ideals our Continental Organization stands for. Yesterday I had the rare privilege of being present at the National Assembly when it was deliberating the bill relating to the ratification of the Constitutive Act establishing the African Union. The seriousness and depth of their deliberation, underlined by a commitment to Pan-African ideals and a firm sense of shared destiny for the African people, reinforces my conviction on the total engagement of the Algerian people and their leaders to the noble causes of our Continent.

Mr. President, in accepting this award, I undertake to do my utmost to live up to this great honour being bestowed on me.

I thank you very much."

Addis Ababa, 20 April 2001

