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Organization of African Unity

OAU AT 30: REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST
AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Address by the Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim
on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the
Organization of African Unity

Africa Hall, Addis Ababa

May 25, 1993

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is thirty years today in this very hall that thirty-one Heads of state and Government of thirty-one independent African countries then, gathered to found the Organization of African Unity. All the Thirty one, except for Ethiopia and Liberia, were young countries emerging from colonialism, and only struggling to find their feet and place in a world, then polarized by ideological confrontation and cold war between the East and West. To them establishing the OAU was both an event and an eloquent statement of decision.

It was an event setting up an institution, embodying their collective will to act as one, in a coordinated manner. It was statement of decision of the young Africa, to define its needs and priorities and how to go about achieving them. It was a moment of decision defining how the young African countries were going to relate to each other; to deal with the many vexing issues arising from the legacies of colonialism, and collectively as a continent, how they were going to interact internationally either bilaterally or within the context of the United Nations. Their wish and determination, found expression in the objectives they set for themselves and for the Organization they founded. They decided that the OAU would strive to promote unity and solidarity among the African States, to co-ordinate and intensify their co-operation and efforts to achieve a better life for the people of Africa; to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence, to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa, and to promote international co-operation having regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

This notwithstanding, Africa has been able to build nations where only colonial outposts or military garrisons existed before. Today, Senegal is a reality, the fact of being an Angolan is real, Mauritius is a nation and the collective of African nations in the OAU is growing from strength to strength numbering fifty one members at present.

Apart from building nations out of colonial possessions, and having to master the art and mechanics of government, our leaders were faced by the equally daunting task of responding to the great expectations of the people, which the euphoria of independence generated. For it was not only getting in the shoes of the departing colonial masters, inheriting their prerogatives, privileges and material comfort, it was also to deliver. It was to respond to the needs of the people for better living conditions, better social amenities, education and health - the promises of which echoed so repeatedly during the campaigns for self-rule and independence. Addressing the problems of development in spite of limited resource bases was a priority which many of our countries set for themselves, and in which they made commendable progress. And notwithstanding the statistics on the difficulties which our countries faced and continue to face today, Africa is certainly a better place now in absolute terms, than it was thirty years ago. There are certainly more roads, more schools, hospitals, more people have access to safe drinking water and better housing.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

These difficulties, which our countries faced individually did not, dampen their enthusiasm or weaken their resolve to pursue their collective objectives within the OAU.

Mr. Chairman,

Perhaps nowhere has that ability proved more decisive, than in the African struggle for decolonization. Africa saw as an immediate imperative, the emancipation of the other parts of Africa then still in the clutches of colonialism. Decolonization became an imperative which had to be met and to which immense resources and diplomatic efforts had to be consecrated. They saw in the redemption of their fellow Africans from the ignominy of colonial bondage, an act of true liberation for the African people as a whole. The overriding conviction was that political independence of an African meant very little if another continued to languish under colonial tyranny. True liberation and independence of Africa, could therefore only come with the total eradication of colonialism and racism from the Continent.

Today, Africa is basically fully decolonized. The former Portuguese territories of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe and Mozambique are free and independent members of the OAU. The Zimbabwean people, with the support of the OAU and the International Community generally, rose to defeat racial tyranny and emerge triumphantly in independence. Even with the bitter memory of the suffering, oppression and destruction perpetrated by the white minority settler regime whose principal Lieutenant Mr. Ian Smith vowed that never majority rule in Southern Rhodesia in a thousand years, the Zimbabwean people were magnanimous in their victory. They did not resort to retribution or vengeance. They sought national unity and reconciliation instead. Today, Mr. Smith is a free citizen, in Zimbabwe, enjoying the protection of the African people he once vowed to annihilate. The diehard racists who fought SWAPO are equally free citizens in independent Namibia

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to salute the determination and resilience of the black people of South Africa, with the support of millions in the world, which has brought us this far. We see in the people of South Africa today, a determination to ensure that their emergence from racism, will mean the creation of a new society free from misplaced prejudices, and ready to take on the challenge of reconciliation, healing and self-renewal. We encourage them to rise above the present phase of difficulties and to persist in dialogue. For this has always been the objective of the black majority: to seek resolution through dialogue. As early as 1969 in its Lusaka Manifesto, Africa through the OAU made clear its preference for negotiations - if conditions conducive to such course of action were provided. Africa wanted dialogue but not dialogue with the deaf. But now that we see white leaders in South Africa with ears and willing to dialogue, we should sustain the process of negotiation. We look forward to the conclusion of the present phase of negotiation, and the formation of a transitional mechanism to prepare the country for genuine elections and guide it to a free, non-racial, united South Africa we all have been fighting for. A South Africa, liberated from Apartheid racial tyranny, will be an important and powerful addition to our ranks in the OAU. We look forward to that day.

mutual advantage. We want an order grounded in International Legality and one which recognizes that this world - this global village - with shared problems, has also shared responsibility to which each country no matter the size, power or wealth has to contribute. We want an order which recognizes and concedes a role for Africa and not one which relegates her to the margins of the international system.

Mr. Chairman,

It is one thing to express a desire, an objective or to champion a principle. It is quite another to have or to acquire the ability to achieve that objective or to have the power to stand up for that which one believes in. Right now, Africa is going through a very difficult economic phase which is not made easy by the necessary but engaging process of political transition, which is also a-pace in the continent.

Unless our countries are determined in their resolve, it is quite easy to succumb to the difficulties of the moment. Yet we can not afford to do so. Africa has lost the strategic importance it had in the global military positioning of the Cold war. It must therefore create a new strategic importance - one which is not predicated on its role of an intermediary in the ideological military confrontation of super powers in the years gone by. It must be a strategic importance founded in its own strength and ability to contribute to the management of World Affairs. And we can only do so if we restore Africa back into the mainstream of world Affairs.

The restoration of Africa back into the mainstream of World Affairs is a process which has begun in earnest. It is a process embodying the resolve of Africa and the OAU, to

independence of the Member States through the effective mobilization of the immense human and natural resources of our Continent. Thus, in 1973, the OAU adopted the African Declaration on Co-operation, Development and Economic Independence, on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Organization. But the struggle for economic development did not end with that declaration. In a further effort to promote economic development in Africa, reduce poverty, promote economic independence through self-reliance and self-sustaining growth, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting in Monrovia in July 1979, adopted the "Monrovia Declaration of Commitment of the Heads of State and Government of the OAU and the guidelines and measures for national and collective self-reliance in economic and social development for the establishment of a new international economic order". In April 1980, the OAU adopted the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos during the Second Extra-Ordinary Session for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy.

In spite of all these efforts, African economies continued to deteriorate to the point of the crisis in the mid-1980s. This crisis was due, in particular, to structural constraints in the African economies and to certain development policy shortcomings, on the one hand, and to the continuation of the unjust and inequitable international economic order, on the other. For example, World Bank statistics indicate that real non-oil commodity prices, have fallen steadily, over the last two decades. For example, between 1973 - 1990, the index of real non-oil commodities fell by about 40%. World markets for specific commodities like coffee, tea and cocoa have fallen an average rate of 11% over the last ten years. Price for cocoa alone, has fallen by

service burden has been one of the major contributing factors to Africa's economic crisis. The OAU Heads of State and Government held the Third Extra-Ordinary Assembly in December 1987 exclusively to discuss the African debt crisis. The Assembly adopted the African Common Position on Africa's External Debt Crisis, which outlined detailed measures to address the debt crisis on the basis of co-operation, continuous dialogue and shared responsibility on account of the interdependence between debtor and creditor countries.

In addition to the adoption of the African Common Position on External Debt, the Assembly also established a Contact Group on Debt consisting of twelve Member States which rotate with the changes in the current chairmanship of the OAU. The Contact Group reports regularly to the OAU Summit on the debt issue and makes appropriate recommendation. The efforts of Africa notwithstanding, the debt crisis of the Continent will only be solved through the adoption of a global and equitable approach within the framework of an integrated, co-operative, development-oriented strategy that takes into account the particular characteristics of the debt crisis in Africa.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since independence, African countries have, individually and collectively, made efforts to promote rapid development of their countries. Every African country has promulgated a series of national development plans. At the regional level, five regional economic groupings have been established, and at the continental level, continent-wide development plans such as the "Lagos Plan of Action", "Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery" have been adopted. These national,

The establishment of an integrated Pan-African economic community through a common market has been the dream of the African people for many decades. At the meetings of the OAU Council of Ministers as well as of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, many resolutions have been adopted on the establishment of the community. These resolutions culminated in the signing in Abuja, Nigeria, on 3rd June 1991, of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. The Treaty has been signed by all the 51 OAU Member States of the Organization and it has been ratified by 26 Member States, 8 countries remain to deposit their instruments of ratification before the Treaty comes into force.

The coming into force of the Treaty will usher in a new chapter in African development, particularly, for the OAU itself. It will no longer be the OAU as we know it today, but an OAU-cum-the African Economic Community. The structure and functions of the Organization will be reformed and realigned to its new mandate and activities. It will relate its activities to those of the recognized Regional Economic Communities which form the pillars of the African Economic Community.

Since the Abuja Summit, the Secretariat has been undertaking activities aimed at laying the foundation for the Community. In this regard, it has concentrated on a series of activities: first, it has, with the other two African Organizations, established the Joint OAU/ECA/ADB Secretariat whose function is to pool their resources together for the implementation of the Treaty. Within this framework, the Chief Executives of the three Organizations have organized a series of regular meetings such as the one which we have just concluded today. These meetings have been preceded by

integration. The Organization has co-operated with the Member States in the establishment of some regional economic groupings such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). It is working closely with the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA), The Southern African Development Community and its predecessor SADCC, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA). The strengthening of these economic groupings and the promotion of co-operation among them will facilitate the establishment of the African Economic Community and help translate into reality our avowed will to take up the serious challenge facing our Continent. Furthermore, the OAU has established a number of specialized institutions by way of strengthening sub-regional, regional and continental co-operation.

These economic groupings should be provided with adequate means to enable them attain their objectives, co-ordinate and harmonize their various programmes so as to accelerate the realization of our long-term objective of African economic integration.

The development of science and technology is a fundamental condition for accelerated socio-economic development of Africa. In the Lagos Plan of Action and the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, the OAU indicated its determination to promote the application of science and technology in spearheading growth and development in the major economic sectors, especially in the area of agricultural research. The OAU has also established Science and Technology Sub-Regional and Regional Institutions and Commissions. It co-sponsored the First Congress of African Scientists held in Brazzaville in June 1987 which culminated

in Rio de Janeiro. The OAU contributed significantly to the Conference and the elaboration of Agenda 21. OAU will play a lead role in the implementation of the provisions of Agenda 21, as far as environmental issues in Africa are concerned. Work on a Convention on desertification is also in progress.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While it is important to put in place the kind of policies which are targeted at reversing economic decline and stimulating growth and development, the overriding consideration must be to ensure that the people who are after all the ultimate beneficiaries of those policies, are fully involved, in their elaboration and execution. The present debate on democratization in Africa is in essence, a debate on how people can and should be involved and empowered to have a say in how their affairs and those of governments are run. We now see in the Continent, a new determination on the part of the people, to ensure that they are situated at the centre of the decision-making process. Governments are also responding more and more to this wish and political dispensations are being given; national conferences and referenda on multipartism are now an integral part of the African political process.

Central to all this, is the realization that a permitting political environment engenders not only political freedom, but it also stimulates the creative genius of a people. Through the creative use of the opportunities which such environment generates, countries may be able to harness the energies of their people and direct them towards productive use. This environment built upon popular participation, will

that they apply to other countries but not Africa. What we can say, however, is that Africa can articulate them within a framework which is more relevant to its own realities and consistent with its history, traditions, customs values and culture.

Africa is today grappling with the task of bringing about such an environment. The process of conversion to multiparty politics is very much in progress. We at the OAU are happy to have been associated with this process of transition through being invited to observe elections in many African countries.

Our priority has been to be of assistance to the countries which have invited the OAU, in not only observing the mechanics of elections, but to think together on how transition can be effected smoothly and without adverse consequences to social order and without undermining the many gains which have been made so far. We ought to look beyond the election date and see how democracy can be sustained and not allowed to be the first casualty of harsh economic adjustments which unfortunately seem to be an attendant part of the process of conversion and transition. In the management of change, it is the firm view of the OAU that the spirit of tolerance must be engendered.

Africa is the most heterogeneous of all continents. It is a mosaic of customs and cultures; religions, ethnies and races. We should use our diversity creatively and transform it into a positive force of human development, instead of allowing it to divide us. In effecting transition, we should not only reach accommodation within our respective political

Charter by setting up the Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights based in Banjul - The Gambia. The Commission, once fully consolidated, will act as the Human Rights ombudsman of Africa. Member States have also responded to complement the efforts of the Organization of African Unity. There are now, in operation, national human rights committees in many countries. In addition, many countries, have enacted laws which give the activities of these committees, the force of law and in so doing placing human rights issues in the mainstream of their political agenda. Our overriding objective is to ensure that human rights are protected, while at the same time, insisting that the specific circumstances of culture, customs values and traditions of Africa, are fully taken into account in evolving a human rights agenda relevant to the people of Africa.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While economic hardships have brought deprivation to the people of Africa, nothing has brought more death and suffering to them than the scourge of conflicts in our Continent. Conflicts have not only led to immense destruction of infrastructure and property, they have undermined the ability of Governments to provide for the social needs of the people - as resources, time and efforts have been diverted to the exigencies of prosecuting wars. Conflicts have bred millions of refugees and displaced persons who now languish in exile, deprived of their humanity, means of livelihood and hope. Conflicts have divided our countries, societies, and nations and seriously undermined unity and long-term stability of the Continent.

change of attitude and perception. Increasingly, there is agreement that we should not for any reason, remain aloof and indifferent to acute human suffering. Instead we should take constructive action; quickly to help the parties in conflicts, reach pacific settlement. This qualitative change of perception is strengthened by the view that the OAU has a central role to play in the resolution of those conflicts.

In their 1990 Declaration on the Fundamental Changes in the World and the political and socio-economic situation in Africa, the Leaders of Africa committed themselves to finding speedy solution to the conflicts raging on in the Continent. They followed up this determination with the adoption in principle, the establishment within the OAU, of a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution in Dakar, Senegal last year.

We in the OAU are determined to rekindle the spirit of our Leaders and their determination to deal with conflicts. We have taken institutional disposition and are now making final preparations to submit to the next Summit in Cairo, for its consideration and approval, a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. The single objective is to put at the disposal of Member States, a comprehensive set of process and arrangements incorporating both Governments and the Secretariat, which can be deployed speedily, to deal with conflicts and conflict situations.

The agreement on the principle of such a mechanism, underlines a fundamental determination, that no matter what efforts we make in economic and political reform, our collective efforts stand to suffer greatly if we do not ensure that conditions of peace and stability exist in Africa. It is

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Anniversaries are occasions for reflection. They also provide unique opportunities for recollection and remembrance. So it is fitting to remember and pay tribute to all the gallant sons and daughters of Africa who fought for Africa's freedom and who stood for the dignity and unity of our peoples. It is not possible to recall all the names, but it is fitting to single out for mention, the Founding Fathers of our Organization to whom we pay homage. I believe, it opportune also to recall the memory of the leaders of the freedom struggle such as Amilcar Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane, Herbert Chitepc and most recently the fallen South African fighter, Chris Hani, who fought for the dignity and freedom of the African and had to pay the ultimate price for their beliefs.

It is also appropriate here to invoke the memory of our late brother and first Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity, Diallo Telli. The OAU and Africa generally owe him gratitude. In my view, time has come to lock into how we can, on a permanent basis, honour his memory and the immense contribution he made to our Organization and to Africa at large.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last three decades of its existence, the OAU has made great efforts in the quest for continental unity. It has deployed its efforts at mediating conflicts, and has focussed the attention of the Member States and engaged the international community to the prevailing problems facing the Continent. The Organization has been instrumental in drawing

This is a crucial juncture for the Organization and its Secretariat. Africa is emerging with difficulty from a phase in its history which focussed mainly on political liberation and nation-building, and is about to embark on a new era - a second liberation - of laying greater emphasis on economic development through the African Economic Community and of political governance. Clearly, there is a great need to strengthen the OAU and its Secretariat so that it is made an effective and efficient instrument in the service of Africa in its quest for peace, economic development and integration. The Secretariat will have to be reformed to face these challenges. It has to be strengthened to render it capable of discharging its present and new mandates. Some of the most important changes will include a review of the structure of the Organization to ensure increased efficiency of the Secretariat to implement the decisions and resolutions adopted by the legislative organs of the Organization. There will also be need to review and rationalize the existence and functioning and effectiveness of the OAU Specialized Agencies.

All these functions required of the OAU and its Secretariat will not be carried out efficiently unless the Organization is endowed with enough resources to do so. At a time when the Organization is faced with increased responsibilities, it needs additionality of resources if it is expected to handle the increasingly crowded agenda before it. I wish therefore to reiterate my appeal to the Member States to complement their political support to the Organization with the provision of the requisite resources to it.