



Organization of African Unity

**MESSAGE OF
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
38TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF
THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY
(AFRICA DAY)**

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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Fellow Africans

On the 25th of May, we shall be commemorating the thirty-eighth anniversary of the founding of our Continental Organization. This is a day when we celebrate not only the life and achievements of the Organization of African Unity as an institution but, equally profoundly, it is an occasion when we pay homage to our own collective aspirations and joint endeavours as Africans. These have been thirty-eight years of holding on together as a people, deriving strength in our common identity, and pursuing the vision of a shared destiny.

As once again we celebrate this day, we take pride in sustaining our faith in each other and for maintaining and consolidating our bonds of unity and solidarity. The fundamental ideals and vision that our Continental Organization represents, particularly the quest for equality, freedom, dignity, solidarity and societal prosperity, have been the aspirations of our people since times immemorial. The struggles that have been waged in this continent against slavery, colonialism, apartheid and racist minority rule, and other forms of oppression and injustice, the blood that has been spilled, and the sacrifices that have been made have all been in the quest to realize these ideals.

Our Founding Fathers, thirty-eight years ago, articulated this spirit in the context of the new era; they created a vehicle - the OAU - for its deliverance, and promoted a dynamic of liberation and transformation. We, who have reached the new century and a new millennium, are now carrying on a responsibility - a responsibility to those generations that have come before us, whose foundation we are now striving to consolidate, and those who will come after us. We owe it to them not only to maintain the momentum but to take it to a higher level.

Since our last celebration, we have seen a number of positive and encouraging developments in the Continent. On the political front, the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a major achievement not only for the people of the two countries but for the Continent as a whole. It was a reaffirmation that it is possible to achieve peace, even after a deep conflict, provided that there is commitment and determination to do so. The leading role played by African leaders and their Continental Organization in resolving this conflict is a testimony to Africa's resolve and capacity to assume responsibility for shaping its own destiny.

The positive developments that are evolving in the Democratic Republic of Congo also provide hope and optimism. The commitment of the parties to the conflict to adhere to the terms of the Lusaka Agreement and to co-operate in its implementation demonstrates a collective desire to end the suffering and destruction that the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo have been experiencing for so long. Similarly, the significant progress that has been achieved in the search for peace in Sierra Leone, and the commitment of the parties to the conflict to address the dual separatist and constitutional crises facing the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros offer hope for the restoration of peace and stability in these countries.

The encouraging process of reconciliation that has been evolving in the Republic of Congo culminating in the successful outcome of the national dialogue has been a matter of satisfaction. Similarly, concerted efforts continue to be made to build on the outcome of the Arta Conference so as to bring about reconciliation in Somalia. These efforts need to be intensified in view of the recurrence of armed confrontations in that country which clearly undermine the overwhelming desire of all Somalis for peace and national reconciliation in their country.

We must build on our efforts to consolidate peace and understanding in all the areas where there are positive indications of movement. However, we also have an obligation to act even with greater vigour to achieve these objectives in areas where conflicts and tension have persisted, a condition which continues to be of great concern to our Organization. I have in mind, in this respect, the countries of the Mano River Basin, and especially the grave situation between Liberia and Guinea, and also the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Burundi, which defies the laudable achievements of the Arusha Peace Agreement. Other such areas including the conflict in Angola due to the intransigence of the UNITA leadership as well as the continued conflict in the southern Sudan despite all the efforts made at the national, regional, continental and international levels.

In the economic and social spheres major milestones have been attained. The launching of the COMESA Free Trade Area late last year, the revival of the East African Community, the decisions taken on the issue of monetary harmonization by the ECOWAS Summit, and the signing of the Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and the Regional Economic Communities by the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) are only a few of the many initiatives undertaken in the course of the year aiming at fostering closer co-operation and integration in the Continent. Vigorous efforts are also being deployed to promote more co-ordination among our countries at a sectoral level.

The AIDS pandemic continues to wreck havoc among our people. It is threatening to tear apart the fabric of our societies and undermine all the achievements we have made in the past four decades of our independence. The evident resolve of the African people at every level to combat this pandemic with increased vigour is therefore an encouraging development. The recently-concluded Summit of African leaders in Abuja, Nigeria, that addressed this disaster and the related infectious diseases, and also a similar Summit held earlier, also in Abuja, on malaria, are yet another manifestation of the determination to confront our challenges head-on.

The urgency that was underscored by these Summits and the commitment to reinvigorate concrete actions for rescuing the survival of our people demonstrate a new determination to confront these daunting problems. Furthermore, the fact that these Summits also involved the participation of representatives from all sections of our societies as well as our partners, and particularly those living with HIV-AIDS, was also evidence of a strong faith in our collective strength.

Overarching all these developments and achievements has been our success in realizing the cherished desire and the long-standing aspiration of establishing an African Union. As we celebrate Africa Day on the 25th of May, we shall also be ushering in a new era for our Continent. It will be the eve of the entry into force of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which is a new elevated framework for cooperation and integration of our Continent. At last we are reaching this milestone that we have aimed for so long; a milestone that opens up a new vista for the realization of our potentials and overcoming the many challenges confronting us.

I wish to pay tribute to all our leaders for living up to the spirit of the Sirte Declaration of 9.9.99. I wish to underscore their role in making this moment possible. The African Union whose establishment was proudly declared by African Heads of State and Government at the Fifth Extraordinary Session of their Assembly in Sirte, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, has now become both a political and legal reality.

The inspiration of the African Union, and the spirit that propelled all of us to pursue it, has been the recognition of the imperative necessity for Africans to pool together our strengths, solidify our unity and solidarity and dedicate ourselves to our common destiny. Only by doing so shall we be able to live in dignity and prosperity as a people. The commemoration of this thirty-eighth anniversary of the OAU, therefore, acquires a special significance because it also marks the beginning of its own re-birth into a new entity, much stronger, more capable and closely

connected to the people of this Continent. Let us use this occasion also to rededicate ourselves to this new beginning as Africans. We should reinvigorate our determination to overcome differences and surmount obstacles in order to realize the vision of a united Africa.

The challenges ahead of us are still momentous and we have no option but to be united. It is an illusion to believe that individually as a people, or each of us separately as nations we can effectively make it in this world which is full of adversities. After all, the challenges that face us, including the HIV-AIDS pandemic, natural and human made disasters, abject poverty, an excruciating debt burden, the recalcitrant conflicts and tensions, invariably exert a collective rather than an individual impact. We need to be together.

Indeed, unity has been our calling throughout these thirty-eight years. However, as we embark into the African Union, the unity that is being pursued and the institutions and structures of the new entity have to be consummately forged to be linked to the people of this Continent. The immediate challenge ahead of us is working towards realizing this.

God Bless Africa.