



Organization of African Unity

*Building Peace in Africa:  
The Commitment of the OAU*

*Presented at the University of Bologna on the Occasion  
of the Conferment of a Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in International Relations (Honoris Causa) to  
H.E. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of OAU*

Excellencies,  
Members of the Academic Community,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured by the decision of the University of Bologna to confer upon me the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy** *honoris causa* in International Relations. I am grateful to the Faculty of Political Science for having proposed my name for this award. I should like to take this opportunity to thank all those who made this occasion possible.

In accepting this distinguished award, I should like to dedicate it to the countless unsung heroes of the continent I hail from, who toil selflessly day and night to ensure that Africa enjoys its rightful place on the world scene.

But first, do allow me to express my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for this very moving ceremony organized on this occasion - an occasion which will remain a memorable one for me. I also consider the honour being bestowed on me today as a tribute to the Organization which I am proud to serve.

I wish also to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the Italian Government for the excellent and promising working relations that have developed, over the last few years, between Italy and the Organization of African Unity. I recall with appreciation the recent visit I undertook to Italy in November 1995 and the important discussions I was able to have with the high officials of this country including the President of the Republic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and leading Parliamentarians. I was moved by the concern shown by the Italian authorities to the problems facing our Continent and peoples. I was particularly encouraged by their commitment to support Africa in its endeavours towards peace and development. The kind relations we have established with the Italian Government augurs well for the partnership we are looking forward to promote with all the countries of Europe as well as with the European Union as an institution.

As I receive this *Doctorate Degree in International Relations*, let me share with you some of my reflections on the future of the African Continent in this rapidly changing world. The emerging new world political and economic order, and the new configuration of power within the international system, raises serious challenges to the Continent. One such challenge relates to the capacity of Africa in assuming its share of responsibility in international relations and diplomacy, especially now, on the threshold of the new millennium. Indeed, as I ponder over recent

developments in the structure of the new world political and economic systems and their likely impact on Africa. a continent which is itself undergoing a dual transition in the political and socio-economic fields, I ask myself, how can Africa forge ahead in its quest for durable peace and sustainable development in an increasingly stratified world where less and less time and effort are seemingly being devoted to the downtrodden of the developing world.

I ask myself what Africa can and must do to accelerate its socio-economic transformation and development. What is the most appropriate political and socio-economic framework to address the challenges of democratization and of promoting human rights; of protecting the environment; of providing better health services to our people; of human resource development and capacity building; of drug abuse and control in

Africa; of promoting gender balance but foremost, the challenge of addressing the scourge of conflicts that have continued to cripple the Continent in various parts.

I ask myself why Africa, the continent with the richest resources, human and otherwise, should continue to be the poorest continent in the world and continue to depend on development aid. Indeed, I ask myself whether the impediments to the efforts of our people both internal and



external towards the reconstruction and development of our Continent are really insurmountable.

Many a scholar in highlighting the factors that have constrained socio-economic transformation in Africa moving in tandem with the rest of the world has often attempted to place more emphasis on the external factors with scanty attention to the equally responsible internal factors such as inappropriate macro-economic framework, inadequate managerial capacities, weak institutions of governance and lack of solid democratic basis. In my view, more work needs to be done to articulate the internal factors that have impeded and undermined thus far the achievement of peace, security, stability and development on our Continent. This is not to suggest that the internal factors solely, are at the centre of Africa's socio-economic and political malaise.

I am however convinced that if the internal factors can be systematically and adequately addressed, it will be less difficult for the Continent to address the external factors. What is required is determination and commitment by African countries to elaborate appropriate policies to address such factors. While the argument that African problems are first and foremost the responsibility of Africa is a valid one, it should not suggest or lead to isolationism or autarky. Indeed, Africa must recognize its own potential in a highly competitive and rapidly changing world. Africa has the

necessary and inherent capacity to meet the challenges of the emerging new world economic and political order. All it requires is to harness its vast potentials both in terms of natural and human resources.

The determination and resilience of its peoples in adverse situations have been amply borne out throughout its history. The struggle for the Continent's liberation this century bears testimony to this characteristic. Through ingenuity, solidarity and total commitment to a cause, the Continent was liberated from centuries of colonialism. We need to pick a leaf from this lesson as we endeavour to address Africa's socio-economic ills.

I therefore argue that with the same determination and commitment, Africa has the capability and capacity to successfully address the internal impediments to the Continent's development efforts. I submit that the resilience of the African peoples as exemplified during the liberation struggles and the lessons learnt from that period, provide sufficient tools and common ground to address the prevalence of conflicts in the Continent.

I submit that conflicts in Africa constitute one of the major internal impediments to Africa's socio-economic-economic development. I wish, therefore, to focus my presentation on the role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the challenge of peace in the Continent. And I

submit that if the gains of the previous half-century were to be sustained, emerging chaos contained and new opportunities pursued, a new partnership for peace, security and development between Africa and the international community must be established to support Africa's efforts towards conflict prevention, management and resolution.

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished Professors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The OAU as a regional organization, is a product of an interplay between the forces of freedom, justice and human dignity and those of domination, subjugation and exploitation. The signing of the OAU Charter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on May 25, 1963, was a clear manifestation of the victory of the forces of freedom, justice and human dignity over the forces of retrogression and oppression that had haunted and humiliated the continent for many decades. The establishment of the OAU was also the culmination of many attempts both inside and outside Africa aimed at promoting a new awareness on the need to facilitate the intensification of the liberation struggles on the continent and to promote and assist Africa's position in the international system.



Significantly, the OAU has, since its inception in 1963, directed its resources and engaged the thoughts and energies of African leaders towards preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in the Continent. In this regard, the OAU has, through Ad Hoc methods of conflict resolution resolved or attempted to resolve the following categories of conflicts: boundary and territorial conflicts, such as those which existed between Algeria and Morocco and between Ethiopia and Somalia; civil wars and internal conflicts having international repercussions, such as the civil wars in Nigeria, Chad and Congo now Zaire and conflicts in territories that were being decolonized such as Angola, Mozambique and Western Sahara. These conflicts can further be re-classified into two major categories: The first relates to inter-state conflicts which characterized the period following the establishment of the OAU. The second category relates to intra-state conflicts such as the Congo crisis, the conflicts in Angola, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Burundi.

I entertain no doubt in my mind that the legacy of the Berlin Conference on the partition of the African continent and the subsequent arbitrary division of countries and demarcation of the African boundaries constitute to a large extent one of the root causes of inter-state conflicts in Africa. Indeed, conflicts arising out of territorial disputes became endemic to Africa for over a decade, especially in the post-independence period. Most African boundaries were drawn by the colonial powers without taking



into consideration issues related to ethnicity, language or common cultural values. The colonial boundaries arbitrarily separated tribes and families, they transferred territory and in the process natural resources also. Recognizing the propensity to inter-state conflict conflicts of the arbitrary demarcated African boundaries and the fact that it would be best to live with the inheritance albeit unsatisfactory, than allow an even worse conflagration which could cut across the entire continent if not contained, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted in Cairo in 1964 Resolution 104 introducing the principle of the inviolability of African boundaries. This principle and that of respect for territorial integrity of Member States has over the years guided the OAU in settling boundary disputes in Africa.

I also submit that the ownership of and some time their control and/or management of transboundary resources could be considered as another source of inter-state conflict in Africa. This particular type of conflict is also linked to territorial claims in that, natural resource endowment on or around common border areas becomes an issue of contention leading to open hostility and develop into armed conflicts. Significantly, conflicts classified in the context of political - geography involving the use and control of natural resource, especially petroleum or strategic minerals have often been subsumed under the broader classification of territorial disputes.

Ideological differences between neighbouring states, especially during the cold war could also be considered as another root cause of conflicts in Africa. While ideology per se may not have been the source of a particular conflict, it however, exacerbated tension and conflicts. However, the end of the East/West ideological divide, has led to the eradication of ideological differences as a catalyst of conflicts.

But our main cause for worry today is the fact that the subsiding of inter-state conflicts seems to have made way for a number of intra-state conflicts. Internal conflicts have affected Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and now Zaire. Certain other African countries unfortunately are also facing potential conflict situations of one form or another. The OAU has made it one of its primary objectives to monitor such situations of potential conflicts.

But, while the OAU has not yet developed sufficient paradigms to test sensitivity to conflicts and to determine the full gamut of likely causes of such situation, it is however, clear that ethnicity has lately joined the category of the list of the major root causes of internal conflicts in Africa.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa presents, by far, the most varied and complex ethnic diversity of all continents. Virtually, all the states of Africa contain a large number of ethnically distinct communities, tribes and language groups. Indeed, most African nations are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious. The issue of minority group "at risk" has over the years remained potentially explosive. Such groups are defined as those minorities which have collectively suffered or benefitted from systematic discrimination, in relation to other groups in the same state.

The emergence of religious extremism has also become a source of internal conflicts in many African countries. But let it also be stated that in countries where such explosives divide, do not exist man has found it possible to invent reasons to exterminate each other. In a country like Somalia, where the population was once considered to be near monolithic, united by language and religion, clan-based divisions have demarcated and exacerbated conflicts arising from locality to clans as against the Nation State. The creation of divisions between different ethnic groups which have led to internal conflicts can also be attributed to the absence of a culture of tolerance in some of our societies. Equally, true is the fact that the

collapse of centralized authority in certain African States have become another source of tension and a major contributory factor for internal conflicts.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Over the past years, African leaders have resorted to various techniques of resolving conflicts. Some of the techniques have been used on an Ad Hoc basis while others have been institutionalized. It is fair to state that these techniques constituted the ingredients that inspired the Founding Fathers of the Organization to make provision in the OAU Charter of the Commission for Mediation, Reconciliation and Arbitration.

It was, however, obvious from the outset, that the Commission had certain limitations which inhibited its ability to effectively address conflict situations in Africa. Most notable was the fact that its jurisdiction was limited to intervention in inter-state as distinct from intra-state conflicts, and then, it was an organ concerned exclusively with conflict resolution as distinct from conflict prevention. As it became more widely known later the dormancy of the Commission, was evidence of the preference of Member States for diplomatic, rather than juridical means of conflict settlement.



The use of Ad Hoc Committees/Commissions, in the settlement of disputes between Member States became prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, the use of Elder Statesmen and Good offices were also common during the period. While some of these conflicts were resolved through such Ad Hoc means, there was, however, the increasing imperative to create a more permanent mechanism for conflict resolution, with the ever-increasing number of conflicts in the Continent. With the proliferation of both inter and intra-state conflicts, the need to update past methods of conflict resolution and the importance of introducing a new political approach and institutional dynamism in the way and manner in which Africa dealt with conflicts became increasingly evident.

And time was, as it is even more today, of the essence. Africa was and is faced with the challenges of building peace, security, stability and development. What then could be the way forward? The major task that faced and continues to challenge the OAU is how to buttress the efforts towards conflict resolution more effectively and efficiently and thereby consolidate the determination of the founding fathers to promote peace, security, stability and achieve political and socio-economic development.

A more vigorous pursuit of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution found its early expression in the 1990 Declaration adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on **'the Political and**

**Socio-Economic Situation of Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World.** In that Declaration, African leaders rededicated themselves to working together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts, both intra and inter-state.

This major shift in approach, clearly a sign of the times, led the twenty-ninth Ordinary Session of the Assembly held in Cairo in June 1993 to establish, within the OAU, a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. In establishing the Mechanism, African leaders saw the opportunity to move from Ad Hoc approaches of conflict resolution of the past, to a more permanent mechanism for the anticipation and resolution of conflicts. They further sought to put Africa at the very centre of attempts at dealing with conflicts, by emphasizing the fact that while the United Nations remain the principal organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Continent should also assure its share of responsibility in addressing the scourge of conflicts in Africa.

The Mechanism has as its primary objective, the anticipation and prevention of Conflicts. In circumstances where conflicts have occurred, it will be its responsibility to undertake peacemaking and peace building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of these conflicts. In exceptional cases, civilian and military missions of observation and monitoring of limited scope and duration may be mounted and deployed.

The Mechanism is built around a policy-making body known as the Central Organ composed of representatives of Member States with the Secretary General and the General Secretariat as its operational arm. The Central Organ functions at three levels - that of Heads of State as well as the level of Ministers and the monthly meeting of Ambassadors accredited to the OAU or duly authorized Representatives.

A Special Fund was also established for the purpose of providing financial resources to support OAU's operational activities relating to conflict management and resolution. The Fund is made up of financial appropriation from the regular budget of the OAU, voluntary contribution from member States as well as from other sources within Africa. Financial contribution from sources outside Africa are also encouraged.

Since the operationalization of the Mechanism, steps have been taken with the view to establishing an Early Warning System. Furthermore, ideas have emerged with respect to the role of the mechanism in peace keeping. These steps and initiatives aim at looking for the ways and means of enhancing the capacity and the effectiveness of the OAU Mechanism in dealing with conflict situations. They also aim at improving on the capacity of the OAU to mount and manage small-scale missions of a peace-keeping



character such as the one deployed by the OAU in Rwanda prior to the signing of the Arusha Peace Accord and the on-going OAU Mission in Burundi.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The process towards building peace, security stability and development in the region cannot move faster without determined efforts to support and strengthen the democratic transition in Africa. African countries have taken individual and collective measures towards further democratization of the political process to allow for popular participation by its peoples in decision-making. We, at the OAU see the issues of governance and the building and/or strengthening of democratic institutions as being critical to efforts aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution.

As part of the efforts to contain the scourge of conflicts in the Continent, we, at the OAU, are encouraging the active involvement of women in conflict prevention, management and resolution. We believe that women of our continent who have played such a pivotal role in the struggle for freedom and are currently playing an important and in many cases a crucial role in the socio-economic development, are a vital force for peace



in our continent. Indeed, to underestimate the role of the African women in this process is tantamount to ignoring a very important variable in conflict resolution in the Continent. Complementary to such a role, we would wish to see African women at the centre of building a culture of tolerance and in supporting the democratization process in Africa.

Equally important is the empowerment of Africa to develop its economic strategy and to permit it to achieve socio-economic progress. For I believe in the notion that without peace there is no development and without development peace is not durable.

**Excellencies.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa has the determination and commitment to vigorously pursue the eradication of the scourge of conflicts in the Continent. Over the years, Africa has made significant progress in dealing with inter-state conflicts. However, the OAU and its leaders face awesome challenges and will need appropriate support from the international community to address the proliferation of intra-state conflicts in the Continent. Indeed, Africa has had the highest number of intra-state conflicts in recent years and has borne a terrible burden of warfare. As an illustration of this burden, it is important to point out that the UN spent \$5.2 billion dollars on peace-keeping

operations in Africa over the past five years (1991 - 1994). This year (1996), the UN is expected to spend more than \$500 million in peace-keeping. The cost of Operation Restore Hope in Somalia amounted to US\$1.6 billion in two years, the equivalent of twice the amount of total bilateral aid from US to Africa.

But recent experiences have demonstrated the potential for success when institutional capacity is bolstered by political will. Where absent, the cost of failure is daunting. Indeed, the case of the genocide in Rwanda and the current humanitarian, political and security crisis in Eastern Zaire points to the need for consolidating the global partnership for peace, security and development. This partnership should involve African Member States, the OAU, the UN and of the international community as a whole.

Indeed, changes in behaviour and attitude, including increasing reluctance on the part of the leading powers, especially those in the UN Security Council, to contribute personnel and to participate in peace-keeping operations in Africa, as was made clear in the case of Liberia, Burundi and Rwanda, have introduced new elements in the international environment. These changes and new elements demand that the OAU examine the

implications of this new equation. Further lessons were learnt from the experiences in Rwanda, where the international community lost critical time in securing the required troops and logistical means.

The partnership that we seek to develop and sustain must be guided by our past experience in dealing with conflict situations. Delayed reaction and sometime total inaction has resulted into massive loss of life and destruction of property leading to the displacement of people, exacerbating the already untenable situation and plight of refugees.

The situation in Eastern Zaire points to the tragedy of inaction. I submit that all signals of possible eruption of serious conflict in the area were clear over the past two years. Yet, no significant action was taken. Even where action was recommended it was not followed with implementation. These are the type of pitfalls we should avoid as we move to enhance our partnership in search for peace, security and development in Africa.

I should like to emphasize that Africa understands the realities of the post cold war international relations. But, Africa is determined to find its place, assert its role and assume its share of responsibility within the framework of the global inter-dependence of nations. The partnership that we therefore seek to develop is one which is based on the mutual benefit and

advantage to both Africa and its partners of the international community. Indeed, in our global village, poverty and instability in one part invariably affects the rest of the world. This is why, we believe that it is imperative for us to establish a genuine partnership and to work in tandem towards building peace and stability in our common village and in promoting socio-economic development through strengthening the bridges of international solidarity and cooperation.

Let us pledge and commit ourselves to this vision and to this common endeavour.

I thank you.