

Copy



Organization of African Unity

*MESSAGE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, ON THE OCCASION OF
THE 37TH ANNIVERSARY OF AFRICA DAY
25TH MAY 2000*

Fellow Africans,

On 25th May 2000, we shall be commemorating the 37th anniversary of our Continental Organization. This is a rather special occasion because it marks the first celebration of Africa Day in the new millennium. We take satisfaction at the fact that we have reached this day with the Organization that embodies our collective will and strength being intact and more consolidated, and that we have maintained our determination to surmount collectively the challenges confronting us.

While the new century presents a lot of hope and optimism for our Continent there are still awesome challenges that we need to surmount in order to attain the vision of a prosperous and dynamic Africa; enjoying peace, security and stability; and with the welfare of her people at a high level.

We are celebrating this occasion while still being bedevilled by the persistence and recalcitrance of the scourge of conflicts. Many lives are being lost on a daily basis due to the failure of resolving our differences peacefully. And where conflicts are at full blown stage, the casualty rate is absolutely staggering. Valuable heritages are being destroyed by the internecine wars that we have been unable to stop. Millions of Africans are living in humiliating conditions as refugees or displaced people.

I do not have to recount the horrors of the conflict in the Great Lakes; the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia; the atrocities perpetrated against the people of Sierra Leone by the rebels; the long and agonizing wars in Angola and in Southern Sudan; the anarchy prevailing in Somalia; and the continued tension in the Comoros as well as the difficult situations which the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic have been going through.

As if the burden of conflicts is not enough, the Continent has lately been confronted by another formidable challenge, that has become more pronounced during this year, namely, the natural disasters. Hundreds of our people lost their lives and hundreds of thousands were displaced due to floods, cyclones, torrential rains and overflowing rivers in Mozambique, Madagascar, Zimbabwe and parts of South Africa. There has also been the devastating drought in the Horn of Africa and parts of East Africa which has caused enormous suffering, including deaths.

All these disasters, besides causing deaths and suffering to fellow Africans have also impeded the development of our countries. And perhaps the most depressing aspect of these natural disasters has been our lack of capacity and preparedness in coping with them. In most cases, we have been unable to anticipate such calamities and to respond to them promptly and adequately.

Despite our inadequacy in coping with disasters, I wish to acknowledge and pay tribute to the sense of solidarity and brotherhood that prevailed in the midst of these particular difficulties. Many Member States of our Organization have responded positively and generously to the needs of their fellow Africans in crises. They have given practical assistance thus making a concrete demonstration of sympathy and solidarity. We must also at this point commend African institutions and non-African Governments and institutions and aid agencies that have demonstrated solidarity and given support to our people at these difficult times.

My fellow Africans, the HIV-AIDS pandemic continues to wreck havoc to the African People. It is the single most indiscriminate killer in the Continent. I keep on referring to the fact that more people have died from this illness than those we have lost in the total number of conflicts that have occurred in the continent during the past two decades. Many people have been INFECTED by HIV-AIDS and almost all of us have been AFFECTED by its terrible consequences.

The challenges facing us are thus numerous, varied and monumental. They require our greater vigour and determination in the bid to live up to the vision and wisdom of our Founding Fathers of maintaining our unity and solidarity and promoting the well-being of our people and the development of our Countries. Indeed, the vigour, commitment, and momentum that we have generated on the continent as we enter the new century is the only vehicle for confronting and surmounting these challenges and for attaining the destiny that we are aspiring for. We need to reinvigorate our efforts and enhance our determination to pursue our objectives.

In July 1999, at the OAU Summit in Algiers, our Leaders took a landmark decision to designate the year 2000 as a year of peace. Symbolic as this decision may appear, it demonstrates a commitment to address effectively the burning issues of peace, security and stability in our Continent. Since the Algiers Summit, there has been an intensification of efforts among our leaders, our Continental Organization, Sub-Regional Organizations and civil society in general aimed at ensuring the realization of the aspiration of establishing a foundation for permanent peace in Africa. Clearly much more efforts are needed. Yet, thanks to the measures already taken, the framework for peace exists for most of the conflict areas.

Similarly, on the 9th 1999, our Leaders adopted the historic Sirte Declaration in which they pronounced their resolve to establish the African Union and to accelerate the establishment of the institutions of the African Economic Community, including the creation of the Pan-African Parliament. The adoption of the Sirte Declaration has brought closer the vision of the Founding Fathers of our Organization and the desire of African peoples for closer cooperation, integration and unity. Steps are being taken towards the realization of the objectives adumbrated at Sirte. It is however self evident that the issue of greater unity demands the collective involvement and undertaking by all sectors of our societies.

As we endeavour to pursue the multifaceted agenda of economic, social and political development within the context of peace, security and stability, we are conscious of the urgent need to overcome both man-made and natural disasters. It is in this context that there have been increased Continental efforts to combat the HIV-AIDS pandemic. It is also in this respect that we welcome the significant initiative which led to the holding, in Abuja, of the first ever malaria Summit in our Continent, for we are only too conscious of the death and devastation that malaria is causing to millions of our people.

We need also to be better prepared and organized at the national, sub-regional and Continental levels to confront emergency situations be they natural or other disasters that our Continent has been experiencing. Such a coordinated approach will certainly, at the very least, minimize casualties.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to urge all African States and peoples to recommit ourselves to the principles and objectives of our Continental Organization and to strive for the promotion of peace, understanding, cooperation and the development of our Continent. We can best do so by closing rank and working together in the spirit of solidarity – the very spirit that inspired our Founding Fathers and which held us together for the last 37 years.

God Bless Africa.

Addis Ababa
May 24, 2000