

**REMARKS BY THE OAU SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
**H.E. MR SALIM AHMED SALIM**  
**ON THE OCCASION OF AN AFRICAN TRIBUTE TO**  
**WOLE SOYINKA**  
**AND**  
**NEGUIB MAHFOUZ**  
**NOBEL PRIZE LAUREATES IN LITERATURE**

**Yaoundé, 18 mai 1990.**

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,  
YOUR EXCELLENCIES THE AMBASSADORS,  
MR CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY,  
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF UNESCO,  
DISTINGUISHED NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS IN LITERATURE,  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I AM HIGHLY HONOURED AND VERY PLEASED TO BE IN  
YAOUNDE, THIS MOST HOSPITABLE CAPITAL OF CAMEROON, AND TO BE  
ASSOCIATED WITH SUCH A SPECIAL CEREMONY. OUR GATHERING IS VERY  
MUCH HONOURED BY THE PRESENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF CULTURE  
WHO BEAR THE HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY OF PROMOTING AFRICAN CULTURE  
IN ALL ITS DIVERSITY.

EXCELLENCIES,

DURING YOUR CONFERENCE, YOU HAVE HAD TO DISCUSS A  
MOST TOPICAL ISSUE, NAMELY «**THE ORGANIZATION OF THE AFRICAN  
CULTURAL ENVIRONEMENT**». THIS IS FUNDAMENTAL BECAUSE THE PROPER  
ORGANIZATION OF SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT IS A MAJOR PREREQUISITE FOR  
PROMOTING MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING BOTH OF WHICH  
CONSTITUTE THE VITAL FOUNDATION FOR THE UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF AFRICA.

QUITE APART FROM YOUR HEAVY AGENDA, WE ARE GATHERED  
HERE THIS EVENING TO CELEBRATE THE TRIUMPH OF INTELLECT AND TO  
PAY DESERVING TRIBUTE TO TWO DISTINGUISHED SONS OF AFRICA, NEGUIB  
MAHFOUZ AND WOLE SOYINKA, BOTH WINNERS OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN  
LITERATURE.

2.

WHEN ONE GOES BACK IN HISTORY AND MEANDERS THROUGH THE EXTREMELY RICH AND VARIED ARRAY OF CULTURES IN AFRICA, MANY A GENIUS WHOSE WORKS NEED TO BE RECOGNISED AND ACCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, WILL NO DOUBT BE DISCOVERED. BUT, IT IS YOU, WOLE SOYINKA AND YOU, NEGUIB MAHFOUZ, THAT THE WORLD COMMUNITY HAS CHOSEN AND QUITE RIGHTLY SO, TO SYMBOLISE THE CREATIVE VITALITY OF THE PEOPLES OF OUR CONTINENT.

HOW COULD IT BE OTHERWISE ? YOU WERE AMONG THE VERY FIRST CONBATANTS WHO CONTRIBUTED, THROUGH A LONG AND DETERMINED STRUGGLE, TO THE LIBERATION OF THE AFRICAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT. WITH THE POWER OF THE PEN, YOU HAVE EDUCATED MILLIONS, PLEADED THE CAUSE OF THE AFRICANS AND THAT OF MILLIONS MORE IN THE WORLD WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE. YOU HAVE ARTICULATED THE VIEW OF THE AFRICAN SOCIETY TO THE WORLD, EVEN IF AT TIMES FOR NEED OF OBJECTIVITY, YOU SEEMED TO LOOK TOO HARSHLY AT THE SOCIETY ITSELF. BUT IT IS THIS WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE THE TRUTH, YOUR DETERMINATION TO CHALLENGE SOCIETY TO THAT TRUTH WHICH EARNED YOU RESPECT. AND YOU HAVE, IN THE PROCESS, MADE CONTRIBUTION TO THE LIBERATION OF THE AFRICAN MIND. YOU JOLTED US OUT OF OUR SLUMBER IN THE EUROPEAN CULTURE AND REVEALED TO US THE RICHNESS, THE ABUNDANCE OF OUR CULTURE. YOUR WORK HAS BEEN KEY TO THE RESTORATION OF CULTURAL SELF-ESTEEM IN OUR CONTINENT. YOU PLANTED THE SEEDS OF A REVOLUTION WHICH IS SLOWLY BUT STEADILY REKINDLING THE LOVE AFFAIR BETWEEN THE AFRICAN AND HIS OR HER CULTURE.

3.

TO YOU SOYINKA AND MAHFOUZ TODAY, WE , THEREFORE, CELEBRATE NOT ONLY YOUR CREATIVE EXCELLENCE BUT WE THANK YOU FOR OPENING THE DOORS FOR SO MANY INTO THE WORLD OF LEARNING. WE COMMEND YOU ALSO FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRUGGLE IN DEFENCE OF OUR CULTURE. IT IS IN LARGE MEASURE DUE TO THE WORK OF MEN OF LETTERS, LIKE YOURSELVES, THAT EVEN THOSE CYNICAL OR CONDENSENDING ABOUT AFRICA NOW ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXISTENCE OF A CULTURE AND OF A CIVILIZATION WHICH IS AFRICAN.

YOU ARE FOLLOWING ALONG THE FOOTSTEPS OF OTHER INTELLECTUAL GIANTS OF AFRICA WHO GAVE LEARNING TO THE WORLD, EVEN IF THE COLONIALISTS HAVE TRIED TO OBSCURE OR HIDE THAT FACT OF AFRICAN INTELLECTUAL GENEROSITY. THE TUTOR OF GREECE, PLATO AND PYTHAGORAS CAME FROM AFRICA, FROM EGYPT LAND OF THE PHARAS, OF THE TEMPLES AND PYRAMIDS. THEY WANTED TO BURY THE ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BRONZE HEADS OF IFE, BUT REVERED THE BUSTS OF ATHENS. THEY DEFINE CULTURE AS «ALL THAT MAN HAS INVENTED IN ORDER TO FORGET THAT HE IS MORTAL»; HAD AFRICA, THE CRADLE OF MAN, NOT INVENTED A CULTURE IN ORDER TO SURVIVE, THEN WHICH LEGACY WOULD HAVE BEEN HOISTED AT THE TOP OF THE PYRAMIDS OR THE ACROPOLIS.



YOU HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH YOUR FORERUNNERS OF THE BLACK DIASPORA, THE AFRO-AMERICANS AND YOUR DISTINGUISHED FOREBEARS, IN THE HEROIC STRUGGLE OF THOSE WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED FORCEFULLY TO THE «MORAL REARMAMENT» OF THE COLONISED PEOPLES PRIOR TO THE LAUNCHING OF THE FINAL OFFENSIVE ON THE POLITICAL FRONT. INDEED, AMONG THE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT THAT HAVE HELPED TO REVITALISE AFRICAN CULTURE AND MOBILIZE THE PEOPLES OF AFRICA ARE THE AFRICAN PERSONALITY AND THE PANARAB PHILOSOPHY IN NORTH AFRICA AMONG WHOSE MAJOR AND PREEMINENT ADVOCATES ARE YOURSELVES WOLE SOYINKA AND NEGUIB MAHFOUZ RESPECTIVELY.

IT IS ALL THESE LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENTS WHICH HAVE NOW CRISTALLISED AND INSTILLED THE LOCAL COMPONENT INTO THE PANAFRICANIST DIMENSION AT THE CONTINENTAL LEVEL. YOU, THEREFORE, UNDERSTAND, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WHY AS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU AND ON YOUR RECOMMENDATION, HONOURABLE MINISTERS, I HAVE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO PAY THIS TRIBUTE IN YAOUNDE ON BEHALF OF AFRICA AS A WHOLE.

I WOULD LIKE, IN THIS RESPECT, TO THANK H.E. PAUL BIYA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON, AND HIS GOVERNMENT FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN ORGANIZING THIS CEREMONY.

I AM ALSO DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO MR FREDERICO MAYOR, THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO, MADAME ALIOUNE DIOP, THE DEVOTED WIFE OF ANOTHER GREAT COMBATANT ON THE AFRICAN CULTURAL FRONT AND DIRECTOR OF THE «PRESENCE AFRICAINE» PUBLISHING HOUSE AND THE AUTHORITIES OF THE YAOUNDE UNIVERSITY FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS CEREMONY WHICH IS AFRICA'S TRIBUTE TO WOLE SOYINKA AND NEGUIB MAHFOUZ, THE NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS IN LITERATURE.

TO YOU, OUR BROTHERS NEGUIB MAHFOUZ AND WOLE SOYINKA, WE EXTOL YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS AND REJOICE WITH YOU AT THE RECOGNITION WHICH YOU RIGHTLY DESERVE. WE REMAIN CONFIDENT THAT YOUR WORK AND ACTIVITIES WILL CONTINUE TO BE A SOURCE OF PRIDE FOR OUR CONTINENT AND PEOPLES BESIDES ENRICHING UNIVERSAL SCHOLARSHIP. BUT WE LOOK TO YOU TO ENHANCE THE CAUSE OF AFRICA FOR IN A VERY REAL SENSE, YOU ARE OUR AMBASSADORS TO THE WORLD. I WISH TO URGE YOU ON IN YOUR MISSION OF PUSHING FORWARD THE FRONTIERS OF OUR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND OF ADVOCATING THE VIEW OF OUR CONTINENT.

I THANK YOU.