



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY
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SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE OPENING OF THE
12TH SESSION OF THE STANDING COMMISSION
FOR AFRO-ARAB COOPERATION**

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It is now over eleven years since we had this unique opportunity of gathering together as a Standing Commission for the family of African and Arab nations in order to address matters of mutual interest affecting our countries and our peoples.

I would like at the outset to express appreciation and gratitude to H.E. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the Government and People of Algeria for the timely invitation to host this long-awaited 12th Session of the Standing Commission for Afro-Arab Cooperation, as well for the warm welcome and the generous hospitality accorded us since our arrival in this beautiful and historic city of Algiers. By hosting this meeting, Algeria continues to demonstrate its unwavering commitment to fostering closer association between the African and Arab people.

I wish to pay tribute to the Government of Algeria for the persistence and consistence it has demonstrated in enhancing Afro-Arab Cooperation. I wish to convey gratitude to President Bouteflika, a distinguished and committed African and Arab leader who has brought his outstanding qualities and experience to bear in fostering a closer relationship between our two peoples. The convening of this meeting in Algiers after a long lapse is a testimony to that determination. This event is yet another demonstration that Algeria is increasingly becoming a frontline state for the African and Arab people in confronting the dynamics of globalization.

To my dear brother and colleague, Dr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Maguid, I wish to reiterate our recognition for the outstanding and dedicated service rendered as Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and especially to place on record our profound appreciation for the remarkable role he has played in the enhancement of cooperation between our two Organizations and regions. Dr. Maguid has always been available as a pillar for support between our two Organizations even at a time when the institutional structures of Afro-Arab Cooperation have been in dormancy.

Since our last Session in October 1989 in New York, over a decade ago, many changes and developments have taken place globally and within our societies. The ending of the cold war has led the evolution of a new configuration of power relations in global politics. New actors have come into the scene in world affairs. At the same time, the phenomenon of globalization presents new challenges and opportunities in economic transactions.

In terms of our own internal transformation in Africa, one of the most remarkable achievements in the past decade has been the victory against colonialism in apartheid. The people of our Continent have now embarked into another stage of development which is the pursuit of higher levels of economic

development through cooperation and integration, and the consolidation of responsive political institutions. Once again, I wish to express sincere gratitude for the support Africa has received from the Arab Governments and people in these endeavours.

Alongside these positive developments, Africa is also faced with numerous challenges including that of HIV/AIDS, devastating conflicts, continuing poverty, and limited capacities to surmount its adversities. Every effort is being deployed to surmount these impediments.

We also recognize the profound changes that have taken place in the Arab world and the determination of the Arab States to reinforce the positive achievements and to overcome the obstacles.

Despite the many positive changes that have taken place in our societies and the common challenges that have confronted us, unfortunately, during the past decade we have not maximized the potential benefits of Afro-Arab cooperation. The affinities among our people, the historical and cultural bonds of association, and the advantages of contiguity have not been harnessed sufficiently.

While there have been a significant rise in bilateral cooperation among some countries in the two sides, at the institutional level, this relationship has remained at a very low ebb, contrary to what was earlier envisaged. The benefits that have been accrued in the limited spheres of cooperation such as trade fairs have not been adequately diversified into other areas. The critical institutions and organs that were established to enhance our relationship have not been functioning effectively.

Let us, from now on, open a new chapter that reflects the true spirit of the historical cooperation between the African and Arab people. Indeed, cooperation between our two peoples is a rational imperative that can be neglected at our peril. We need therefore to develop a strategic vision that enable us to identify and rectify some of our deficiencies, mobilize ourselves effectively and endeavour to accomplish our desired objectives.

We in the OAU side are committed to continue working closely with the League of Arab States in sustaining and enhancing Afro-Arab cooperation. The difficulties that have been encountered are only temporary. With our commitment and determination they can surely be overcome. It is important that we enhance this relationship both during good times as well as in periods of difficulties.

I cannot conclude my remarks without referring to one important issue which has always served as a unifying factor between our two peoples. This is the valiant struggle of the Palestinian people to self-determination and

independence - a struggle which Africa has always identified with and has sought within its means to render its full solidarity and support. It is an incontestable fact that since our last meeting significant developments have taken place. The Palestinian people have attained major advances. Yet as we meet here in Algiers, the challenges facing our brothers and sisters in Palestine are awesome. Given the recalcitrance of the Israeli authorities, the killings, maiming and humiliation of the Palestinian people which has almost become a daily occurrence and given the dangerous escalation of the conflict as evidenced by Israel's attacks inside Lebanon including on Syrian positions, it is imperative not only to reaffirm our support and solidarity but also to work jointly towards ending that situation and strive in the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people in accordance with UN resolutions and the ending of occupation of Arab territories.

I thank you for your attention and I wish this Session of the Commission success in its deliberations.