



**Organization of African Unity**

**Statement by the Secretary General of the OAU,  
Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, on the occasion of the opening  
of the All-Africa Conference on African Principles of  
Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation**

**ECA Conference Hall  
Addis Ababa,  
8 November 1999**

**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE OPENING OF THE ALL-AFRICA CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN  
PRINCIPLES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND  
RECONCILIATION  
HELD AT THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION OF AFRICA  
CONFERENCE HALL - 8<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1999**

- Mr. Chairman,
- Your Excellency, the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ato Meles Zenawi,
- Excellencies,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to join Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the chairman of this opening session in extending a warm welcome to all the delegates who have been able to attend this conference which is devoted to a subject of particular relevance and importance for the African continent. Your presence here is yet another indication that the people of this continent are fervently committed to searching for every ways and means that will ensure sustainable peace in our Continent. I commend the organizers for the painstaking efforts that they have made in bringing to reality the idea of searching into ourselves as a people and identifying some

of the institutions and practices which can complement the continental endeavours for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Only a few days ago, at this same venue, I had the honour of sharing the podium with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, at the opening of the African development forum devoted to addressing the challenges of globalization and the information age for our Continent. Your presence here today Mr. Prime Minister is again a firm testimony of your personal commitment, and that of your Government, to the cause of peace and development in our Continent.

The issue of peace is indeed of primary importance for the Organization of African Unity. Throughout its history, African leaders have endeavoured to seek for ways and means of ensuring that the African continent eliminates the conditions that provoke the occurrence of tensions and their explosion into conflicts. In this they have been guided by their collective conviction that freedom, equality, justice and dignity are legitimate aspirations of

the African peoples, and by their desire to harness the natural and human resources for the advancement of the continent in all spheres of human endeavour. They were inspired by an equal determination to promote understanding between the African peoples, and to rekindle the aspirations for brotherhood and solidarity in a larger unity transcending linguistic, ideological, ethnic and national differences. And what is more important is that they were fully convinced that to achieve these lofty objectives, conditions for **peace** and **security** must be established in the continent and be maintained.

As the Secretary General of our Continental Organization, I am pleased to be associated with the aims and objectives of this Conference because they relate to the quest of revitalizing the capacities for promoting sustainable peace in the continent. This is particularly significant within the present context in which African leaders have taken the lead in dealing with the scourge of incessant conflicts that are causing colossal loss of life, horrific injuries, and massive destruction of property. It is therefore encouraging to



note that this conference is taking place with the strong support of the United Nations and the financial assistance of the Government of the United Kingdom. I believe that through such partnerships we can achieve our common aspiration of promoting peace and development in Africa, leading to the enhancement of global peace and stability.

The active involvement of the African Renaissance Institute with this initiative is worthy of special acknowledgement. I had the privilege of participating in the launching of the Institute four weeks ago. The endorsement given to this Institute by so many leaders of our Continent as well as by the elder statesmen of Africa who attended to the launching ceremony, is an expression of support to the ideals of the African Renaissance. The fact that at so early a stage the Institute is able to be associated with an important venture such as this conference is again a sign of hope and confidence for its future prospects. Considering that the objectives of the Institute is to work towards the development of our Continent, the OAU looks forward to cooperate with them in

confronting the challenges of peace, security, as well as the overall development of the African peoples.

As you may recall, inspired by the collective vision of the Founding Fathers of our Continental Organization, and the work of successive African leaders who remained preoccupied with issues of peace and stability on the Continent, an OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution was established by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting in Cairo, Egypt, in 1993. Since its establishment, six years ago, the Mechanism has strived to contribute, in various ways, to the efforts aimed at eradicating, or at least reducing, the prevalence of conflicts.

The priority objective of the OAU Mechanism as mandated by the African Heads of State and Government is the prevention of conflicts. The sad reality however is that due to a combination of factors, we have not always succeeded in preventing conflicts. Nor have we been able to resolve them rapidly when they occur. This

has necessitated costly ventures into crisis-management to ameliorate their catastrophic effects. This inability to act decisively and effectively where relevant, has compelled us to continually review the methods used in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Put differently, we have a responsibility to explore all possible avenues and methods of conflict prevention, management and resolution in order to confront the scourge of conflicts in our Continent which in the overwhelming majority of cases are internal in character.

Indeed, it is for this reason that this All-Africa Conference on African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation is of particular interest to us at the OAU. It is painfully true that in many of our societies, the absence of peace and security continue to traumatize the entire populations but more particularly the vulnerable sections. Furthermore, in some instances, carefully negotiated peace Agreements have broken down, leading to the resumption of hostilities. These unfortunate developments require the reconsideration of some of the approaches.

This undertaking is all the more important due to the character of the present day conflicts in our Continent. The predominance of intra-state conflicts has deepened hostilities in some cases to the level of tearing down the very fabric of societies. Acute tensions and severe suffering prevail in the very heart of societies in which conflicts occur. In an effort to resolve and reconcile such conflict situations, it is therefore necessary to deploy methods that can penetrate to the very foundation of relationships among the people, within their own locale and in a manner they can directly relate with. The summoning of traditional African principles becomes quite relevant in this respect.

Having gone through the conference programme and recognizing the high level of expertise and knowledge that have brought together under this initiative, I believe that one of the greatest challenge before you is to examine in an in-depth manner, how we can revitalize our current endeavour in dealing with



conflicts by also making use, where appropriate, the traditional principles.

This initiative is particularly timely, given the problems that we continue to face in dealing with current and potential conflict situations in the continent.

We need to explore all avenues to deal effectively with the conflict situations in our Continent, which traumatize our populations, bleed our people, destroy our resources and severely impede our efforts at development. We need also to explore all possible mechanisms to ensure that Peace Agreements, once negotiated will endure. We must learn from past experiences of successful and even unsuccessful conflict resolution efforts to build for the future.

In this endeavour, you will find in the OAU, an eager partner, ready to tap from the fountain of traditional African wisdom, to usher in a new era of peace, security and stability for succeeding generations of Africans. For a start, we must join hands together, once again, as we did during the liberation struggle to strive towards the realization of the proposal made by the Head of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo and adopted by our leaders in Algiers in July this year, of making the year 2000, the year of peace, security and solidarity in Africa.

I thank you.