



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
AT THE OPENING OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING
ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AFRICAN UNION
AND THE PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT**

**MEHARI HOTEL
TRIPOLI**

31 MAY 2000

Brother Muammar Ghaddafi, Leader of the Great Al-Fatah Revolution,

Excellencies Heads of State and Government

Honourable Speakers of Parliament

Distinguished Ministers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to join the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Sudan in thanking the Leader of the Great Al-Fatah Revolution, Brother Muammar Ghaddafi, for his important and inspiring address which has provided guidance on the various aspects of the pertinent issues that we intend to deliberate upon in these three days. The important contribution made by the Leader in taking bold initiatives culminating in the Sirte Declaration of 9.9.99, and the wisdom and guidance he continues to offer in articulating and concretizing this vision have been critical factors in our quest towards the attainment of greater unity and solidarity among our countries and peoples.

I would like to take this opportunity also to convey, through the Leader, to the Government and people of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, our appreciation for hosting this Ministerial meeting on the Establishment of the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament, and for the warm welcome and hospitality that has been accorded to us. Once again, the Government and the people of the Great Jamahiriya have demonstrated their strong commitment and devotion to the cause of African unity and solidarity.

It is also an honour to have in our midst some of our distinguished leaders in the Continent. The presence at this meeting of President John Jerry Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana, President Omar Hassan El Bashir of the Republic of Sudan, President Alpha Oumar Konare of the Republic of Mali, President Idriss Déby of the Republic of Chad, President Bakili Muluzi of the Republic of Malawi, and President Charles Taylor of the Republic of Liberia is a further reaffirmation of the seriousness which our leaders attach to the Sirte Declaration and to the achievement of its objectives. We acknowledge and recognize the important role which they have played and continue to play, both individually and collectively, together with their peers, in pursuing the realization of the objectives of the Sirte Declaration. I know that some of them will address this Council tomorrow. We very much look forward to their addresses, advice and guidance.

It was only eight months ago that we were in the Jamahiriya, where African leaders, in all solemnity, adopted the historic Sirte Declaration which proclaimed the decision to establish the African Union and to accelerate the implementation of the Abuja Treaty.

Our being in the Libyan Jamahiriya for the second time in less than a year is, indeed, a testimony of the remarkable hospitality of this great nation. But more importantly, it is a manifestation of the determination and commitment of the

leadership of this country and its people to the vision and objectives of the Sirte Declaration. It is also an example of the sacrifices the Jamahiriya has been willing to make in order to attain the goals that our Continent has for so long aspired to achieve.

This coming together of our Ministers here in Tripoli, preceded by a meeting of high-level delegations of Experts and Parliamentarians from almost all Member States of our Continental Organization underlines the irreversibility of the momentum gained in pursuing the objectives of Sirte. It also signifies that the preparation process for establishing the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament is entering an important stage.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 9.9.99, inspired and guided by the vision of the Founding Fathers of our Continental Organization and taking cognizance of the challenges confronting our Continent, our leaders took the resounding step of deciding to launch into a higher level of unity, and to put in place institutions that will promote cooperation, integration, and solidarity at a much faster pace. In its essence, this was a decision reasserting the wishes and desires of the African peoples as manifested in their quest to surmount the many obstacles impeding a closer interaction. It underscored our collective commitment and determination to pull

together our energies so that we can enhance our strength as a Continent and as a people. It represents an acknowledgement of our common destiny and a realization of the unfolding historic opportunity of bringing into reality a vision that we have dearly held for the past four decades – the vision of one Africa, coherently united.

The Sirte Declaration is, therefore, a statement of principles, a commitment, an engagement call for us as African people. It is an important milestone in the development of our Continent and in its quest to promote peace, security and stability. However, in order to achieve its objectives, the Declaration has to be operationalized. Its substance has to be elaborated, and details that would allow action to take place have to be provided. This has been one of the major challenges since we left the Jamahiriya in September 1999. It is a challenge that all of us - Member States and the General Secretariat - have to overcome.

The vision espoused in the Sirte Declaration is, therefore, quite clear. The challenge that lies before us is one of implementation. How can we realize the collective vision which our leaders pronounced in Sirte?

There is no doubt that there exists an unmistakable political will and determination to construct a stronger and united Africa, based on a reinvigorated and renewed institutional foundation and structure. Similarly, the collective desire to seize the historic opportunity before us to move the continent irrevocably towards a

qualitatively superior form of cooperation and integration in order to fulfill the inspiring and worthy vision enunciated by the Founding Fathers of our Continental Organization is beyond question. Indeed, this Ministerial Meeting provides an appropriate opportunity to map out and illuminate the path which we must all travel towards the attainment of the unity envisioned by our leaders thirty-seven years ago, and reiterated in the Sirte Declaration. Yet, in order to achieve this, we must confront and overcome the challenges that lie ahead.

On the one hand, we must overcome those obstacles that relate to, or result from, our own level of preparedness to move along this new trajectory. We need to address, frankly and openly, the problems which are likely to derail our quest for greater unity and solidarity in our Continent. Can we, for example, achieve the political and economic integration articulated in both the Abuja Treaty and the Sirte Declaration, with the institutions which this integration requires, without a radical rearrangement of the existing structures?

On the other hand, Africa must also face up to the external factors which, of necessity, impact upon our aspirations for the creation of the African Union; chief among these is the potential threat of the marginalization of our Continent arising from the phenomenon of globalization and the construction of restrictive trading blocks and alliances in other parts of the world. While some of these are factors which may pose obstacles to our efforts at forging greater unity and solidarity among ourselves,

paradoxically, they may also be motivating factors underlying the imperative necessity to pull together as one united African people with one united voice.

The major challenge that should, therefore, occupy the collective wisdom of this meeting is the urgent need to agree on concrete, practical and realizable steps which can advance the continent towards attaining our vision. Furthermore, in prescribing these concrete measures, it is important to recognize that both the two meetings of Experts and Parliamentarians which have preceded this Ministerial Meeting have provided a momentum for advancing the debate and exchange of views on the way forward in our common project of building the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament.

I am confident that, despite some differences in approach, this meeting will arrive at the necessary consensus on concrete proposals which we can take to our leaders at their next Summit in a little over a month's time in Lomé, in order to facilitate the speedy establishment the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament.

In conclusion, let me underline the unique opportunity facing this Ministerial meeting. We all recognize the historic nature and far-reaching impact of the decision taken by African leaders in Sirte on 9.9.99. Succinctly put, that decision represented a culmination of the great efforts and aspirations of the Pan-Africanists of our Continent over the years. Sirte made

what thus far had been an ideal and a dream into a realizable objective. Our leaders in their wisdom have spoken. Their voice has been loud and clear. It was heard within our Continent and far beyond the shores of our Continent. It has rekindled hope and raised great expectations. The role of this Ministerial meeting is to live up to these hopes and translate the Sirte Declaration into a concrete programme of implementation for the consideration of our leaders next July. It is a task which must be fulfilled. Indeed, I am confident that it is a responsibility which the distinguished Ministers gathered here in Tripoli will not fail to accomplish.

I wish you successful deliberations, and I thank you for your attention.