



Organization of African Unity

**Statement by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General
of the Organization of African Unity at the Opening of the
Summit on Agenda for Africa at the Dawn of the
Third Millennium**

**Libreville, Gabon
18 January 2000**

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- Your Excellency, El-Hadj Omar Bongo
President of the Republic of Gabon,
- Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government
- Honourable Ministers,
- Representatives of International Organizations,
- Excellencies
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure for me to participate at this summit. That this event should be taking place barely a few months after the Fourth Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU which took place in Sirte, Libya where far-reaching decisions to accelerate the integration of Africa were taken is further demonstration of the seriousness and commitment of the leadership in Africa to tackle and overcome the problems that plague our continent. I wish therefore to thank the Government of the Republic of Gabon and especially the Head of State H.E. President Omar Bongo for hosting this important gathering which, as it were, would be focusing specifically on the issues of economic growth and poverty alleviation.

The advantage that we have in this exercise is that our continent has on a quasi-regular basis been the object of innumerable programmes of action and agendas aimed at its socio-economic upliftment. All these have helped Africa churn out its own Blueprint to face and be an actor in the globalising world. The Abuja

Treaty establishing the African Economic Community along with the Cairo Agenda for Action in relaunching Africa's socio-economic development, reinforced by the recent Sirte Declaration to my mind set the scene and constitute the bedrock on which this meeting and all such events should evolve. The parameters for development in Africa have been defined. We now need with our partners both bilateral and multilateral, to develop appropriate, time-bound and result-oriented action plans matched with adequate resources to concretise and meet these development objectives.

In this regard, the involvement and participation of the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund and the senior leadership of the World Bank provides a special significance to this summit. As major partners to our continent's development, and being institutions that play an important and influential role in global development thinking and practice, their involvement in such a strategic dialogue is both fitting and a source of encouragement. One hopes that the participatory and consultative spirit embodied in this summit will serve as a marker of Africa's desire to enhance such modalities in all engagements with our global partners during the new millennium.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

The quest to promote economic growth and to do away with the scourge of poverty has been at the centre of our continent's development endeavours throughout the post-independence period. At both national and continental level, African governments and their peoples committed themselves, quite at an early stage, to accelerate growth and to achieve sustainable development. During the past four decades, a number of initiatives have been taken individually and collectively to achieve this objective.

Indeed, more recently almost all African countries have embarked on the most profound political and economic reform programmes which entail such measures as redefining the roles and functioning of the public, private and civic sectors; nurturing higher levels of efficiency in these sectors; and also fostering more pluralism and liberalisation.

All these bold measures that are being undertaken, underline the fact that Africa is entering the new millennium fully conscious of the critical importance of growth and poverty eradication in its development agenda. In this respect, the question is not whether Africa is cognisant of how growth and poverty impinge on the general development of its peoples. It is not even whether Africa's leadership is committed to surmounting these impediments. Rather, of central concern to Africa is how to surmount the formidable obstacles that have been encountered during the past decades in its various endeavours to promote growth and attain sustainable development.

By the early 1990s, there was a general consensus in the continent that sustainable development involved initiating major domestic reforms in the socio-political and economic spheres, on the basis of a conducive international environment that supports and reinforces such internal efforts.

In trying to achieve this, during the past two decades African countries have refined their institutions of governance, optimised the operation of market forces, rationalised resource deployment, and generally opened up their economies. Some of these measures have inflicted severe pain to the population and in some cases they have even triggered instability.

The experience to-date, however, is that the anticipated support from the international community that was supposed to bolster these efforts has not been consequential. The level of official development assistance has declined, the debt burden remains excruciating, terms of trade continue to be unfavourable for Africa, and the structure of decision-making in major global forums keeps on alienating the continent. The synergy between Africa's domestic reforms and international support is seriously lacking.

The failure of the international community to complement adequately Africa's transformation efforts has contributed in a significant way to the low level of economic growth during the last quarter of the last century. And even more seriously, it has undermined the domestic efforts to arrest the pervasive poverty that

has created more misery and untold suffering to our peoples, and quite often leading to political instability encouraging certain elements of our society to take advantage of such situations to launch themselves in unconstitutional adventures on the political front.

As we begin the new Century it is necessary to consolidate the initiatives aimed at enhancing the necessary complementarities between domestic reforms in Africa and the international economic and political relations. A conducive and sympathetic international environment is a critical imperative for the success of Africa's initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable growth and poverty eradication. This includes increasing the level of resource flows into the continent both through additional quantities and also improving accessibility to such facilities. It is necessary in this regard to ensure that the little growth that is being achieved is reinvested within the countries. The evident trend of repatriating the surplus generated from growth specifically to meet debt servicing schedules also accounts for the continued prevalence of acute poverty despite some economic growth in our countries.

Support to domestic reforms also includes the strengthening and expanding the recent initiatives taken to relieve the debt burden among developing countries, improving the conditions of international trade, ensuring that Africa's voice in global forums is reinforced, and also providing timely and effective support to the continent's multifaceted political initiatives in the areas of good governance, democratization and the search for peace and security.

African States have committed themselves to working together in meeting the challenges of the new millennium. The decision taken recently in Sirte, Libya, by Heads of State and Government to establish an African Union by the year 2001, and to accelerate the process of implementing the Abuja Treaty is a reaffirmation of this commitment and a recognition that economic growth and poverty eradication can only be attained through collective endeavours.

Africa also realises that failure to generate sustainable growth and to alleviate the misery and suffering caused by poverty has contributed significantly to the proliferation of conflicts and instability in the continent. As we strive to prevent, manage and resolve prevailing and potential conflicts, our commitment to pursue and consolidate peace, security and stability at the advent of this millennium demands also that we address with courage and condour the factors that impede the achievement of these noble objectives, including the fight against corruption and bribery leading to corruption.

I sincerely hope that this meeting, and the dialogue we will be undertaking with our partner institutions – the World Bank and the IMF – will serve as a starting point for developing a broader framework for tackling the problems of growth and poverty in Africa. This framework needs to be consistent with the already laid out strategies. We, at the OAU, pledge our continuing support and co-operation to all initiatives aimed at that direction.

I thank you.