

NOTES ON THE LECTURE ON THE THEME:

**“PRESENT AND FUTURE TRENDS
OF THE AFRICAN UNION”
BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM**

At the

**COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE, TANZANIA
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"PRESENT AND FUTURE TRENDS OF THE AFRICAN UNION"
LECTURE BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, AT THE
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Introductory Remarks:

I am very appreciative of the invitation extended to me by the Command and Staff College of the Tanzania People's Defence Forces. It is nice to be back in Monduli. As Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and National Service I used to be quite a regular visitor at the Tanzania Military Academy. This was between 1985 and 1989. I still have vivid memories of the colourful and moving farewell parade and function held here in my honour a few days before I left for Addis Ababa in September 1989 to take up my new responsibilities as Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity. It is therefore almost thirteen years since I was last here.

I am pleased to be here to address Senior Military Officers on a subject of particular relevance and importance to our country and to Africa as a whole. I am particularly

pleased to do so to an audience which includes several Senior Military Officers from a number of African countries.

Theme:

I have been asked to share with you some reflections on the **Present and Future Trends of the African Union**. In doing so, I proceed from the assumption that you are fairly familiar with past efforts at integration in the continent. Nonetheless I believe it is important to recapitulate what has been done in the past in-order to put the initiatives of the African Union in a proper context. It is important to do so for two reasons. First, in order to be able to take note of the important contribution made by the Pan African Movement toward the larger goal of a united continent. Second, and no less important, in order to dispel the misconception that the decision made by African Leaders in Sirte on 9 September 1999 was a completely new idea or that it was a brainchild of one or two leaders.

Evolution of Pan Africanism and Formation of the OAU

The idea of a united Africa has pre-occupied Pan Africanists both those within the continent and in the Diaspora for many years. Indeed last year marked one hundred years of Pan Africanism. It would be recalled the first International Conference aimed at promoting Pan-Africanism was held in London in 1900. Various initiatives have been taken with a view to the realization of this objective. Indeed the Pan Africanist Movement provided the momentum, which resulted in contacts, and consultations, which eventually led to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity in May 1963 in Addis Ababa.

It is pertinent to recall that prior to the holding of the OAU founding Summit at the invitation of OAU Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie, the then independent African states were divided in different groups. Such groups included the Casablanca Group, the Monrovia Group and the Brazzaville Group.

All these had their own perspectives on the way forward and on the approach towards unity and on how to face the challenges ahead. Furthermore, even at the formation of the OAU in Addis Ababa, the differences of approach were manifest between those who wanted a more revolutionary process towards Continental unity and those who were more cautious and guarded in approach. Indeed, the debate on what type of Unity our Continent should aspire for continued and was also manifest at the Cairo Summit during the First Ordinary Session.

Yet, throughout these debates, one thing remained clear. No one group, nation, or individual leader, at any point in the evolution of this process, doubted the fundamental need for Africans to pursue their destiny collectively. The different voices were motivated by a collective desire for a better future and inspired by the determination of generations of Africans to regain their dignity and self-determination.

It is in this respect, that the idea of unity, since the foundation of our Continental Organization, has represented a resolve to pursue a vision of the future. It has embodied a bond of fraternity and solidarity among all the people of our Continent. It has constituted a vehicle for articulation and action.

It is important to underscore this point because the very act of sustaining a fervent determination to pursue the path of unity, particularly after coming out from the trauma of more than a century of colonial domination and subjugation was significant in itself. We are all-aware of the ravages of colonialism, particularly its tendency to divide societies, disarticulate structures of production, and obviate every possibility of establishing linkages. Not only were social groups pitted against each other, but also relationships of superiority and inferiority were deliberately fostered, structures of production were detached from those of consumption, and parts of our nations or even the Continent as a whole were alienated from each other.

Yet, our leaders and our people, rose above this devastating experience and held firmly to the ideal of Continental unity; realizing that it is mainly through our oneness can the challenges ahead be surmounted.

The OAU Charter – The Importance of Unity:

Here it is relevant to go back to the charter of the OAU. In it, the Founding Fathers articulated a clear vision of the destiny of the continent – a vision that has stood the test of time. In the charter, a major emphasis is placed on promoting the unity, solidarity and cooperation among the African people. Indeed the OAU charter is very explicit in underlining the totality of unity – encompassing economic, social, political and overall developmental dimensions.

As you are all aware, the immediate challenge at the formation of the OAU was to consolidate the dynamic force of the then Independent African States so as to liberate the entire continent from the yoke of colonialism and apartheid.

For two decades this objective was pursued with vigour and determination. The OAU and its member states provided political, diplomatic, financial and in some cases military support to the liberation movement. The OAU Liberation Committee with its Headquarters in Dar Es Salaam played a pivotal role in this.

The Initial Challenges of the OAU:

The Challenge of Liberation:

Governments and peoples of Africa were fully galvanized in the prosecution of the struggle. In the process during the period of the struggle, we fostered a closer identity, reaffirmed a commitment to attaining a vision articulated by the Founding Fathers, and recognized the relevance and importance of our continental organization.

It is an indisputable fact that one of the most important achievements of the OAU has been in the domain of liberation. With the liberation of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the ushering in of a democratic, non racial, non-sexist, united South Africa in 1994; the list of independent African States –

members of OAU had risen from 32 (at the time of the OAU's founding in 1963) to 53 today.

The Challenge of Economic and Social Development:

Although not pursued with the same vigour, dynamism and commitment as the liberation struggle, considerable efforts were also made during this period to promote cooperation and development in the economic and social domains in conformity with the OAU principles and objectives.

The Experience of pursuing strategies of development had revealed that in the two decades during which the newly independent countries had initiated major transformations in the political, social and economic sectors, the fragmented economies and the lack of linkages among national systems were acting as a fetter for rapid sustainable development for the people of Africa. It would also be recalled that from the beginning of the 1980s our Continent entered into a severe economic crisis that begun to undermine most of the achievements gained in the first two decades of independence.

All these factors underlined the need for having a concerted effort among African countries in addressing the Continent's economic predicament. These concerted efforts included the need for fostering closer cooperation and integration among African countries.

Between the mid 1970s and 1990, a series of strategies, Declarations and Plans of Action were adopted within the framework of the Continental Organization. These included: the 1973 Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence; the 1979 Monrovia Strategy for Economic Development of Africa; the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action; and the 1986 African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery.

All these initiatives were attempts of OAU Member States to develop collective responses to the socio-economic problems facing the Continent. Concerted efforts were made to establish Economic Communities in the various parts of the Continent. The Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC); all these Regional Economic Communities were established during this period.

The New Challenges

Impact of Global Fundamental Changes:

The end of colonialism and apartheid necessitated that the OAU had to reorient its priorities. This was particularly so because the period also coincided with the end of the cold war and the emergence of new challenges facing the continent. The Global changes included the political and socio-economic changes in Eastern Europe; the steady move towards political and monetary union in Western Europe; the increasing trend towards regional integration; the establishment of trading and economic blocs as well as the advances in science and technology including the increasing access to and use of information communication technology.

Africa had to reposition itself and establish its own relevance and strategic importance outside the context of the East-West rivalry. This was a mammoth task considering the realities of the continent. To begin with, it would be recalled that the period (the end of the liberation struggle and the beginning of the end of the cold war) coincided with the severe economic crisis that afflicted our continent so much so that the 1980s were characterised by some as a “lost decade” for Africa. The adverse consequences of this downturn were to destroy the development gains (e.g. in education and health sectors) accrued during the first twenty years of independence and to severely undermine the structures and operational systems in our countries. Furthermore, the economic crisis resulted in tension and instability in our societies.

OAU 1990 Declaration on Fundamental Changes:

In my address to the Heads of State and Government at the Summit in Addis Ababa in July 1989 following my election as Secretary General I urged our leaders to put an end to cycle of violence in our continent; to erase the image of a continent

of abject poverty; where conflicts are endemic; corruption rampant and where people are forced to vote with their feet as demonstrated by the presence of millions of refugees and millions more displaced persons.

Subsequently and taking into account of the fundamental changes in the world, I presented to the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting in Addis Ababa in July 1990 my report on "Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and their Implications for Africa: *Proposals for Africa's Response.*" At that summit African Leaders adopted a far reaching Declaration.

In the Declaration, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed that Africa's development was the responsibility of their governments and peoples. They expressed their determination to lay solid foundation for self reliant, human centred and sustainable development on the basis of social justice and collective self-reliance, so as to achieve accelerated structural transformation of the economies. Within that

context they rededicated themselves to work assiduously towards economic integration through regional cooperation.

The Summit also renewed the determination of Africans to work together towards peaceful and speedy resolution of all the conflicts on the Continent. This included internal conflicts which hitherto was considered an issue of internal affairs and therefore a no go area for the OAU.

The 1990 Declaration thus provided the Continent with a new momentum in its efforts to collectively address the challenges facing the African people.

At this Summit African Leaders, in a sense, set out a new Agenda for the continental organization. That agenda included putting emphasis on economic cooperation and integration, promotion of peace, security and stability through conflict resolution, furthering the process of democratisation, fostering transparency and accountability and respect for human rights.

It was with this background that the Heads of State and Government met in Abuja, in June 1991, and signed the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community – otherwise known as the ‘Abuja Treaty’. The objective of the Community is to promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of African economies in order to increase economic self-reliance and promote an indigenous and self-sustained development.

The Treaty provides for the Community to be established gradually in 6 stages of variable duration over a transitional period not exceeding 34 years. It also recognizes the Regional Economic Communities as the building blocs of the African Economic Community. The Treaty entered into force in 1994 after acquiring the necessary ratifications, and the subsequent 5 years were devoted to accomplishing the objectives of the first phase of its implementation – which basically involved the consolidation and rationalization of the Regional Economic Communities.

By 1999, every region had an Economic Community focusing on different aspects of development, and every OAU Member State belonged to one Regional Economic Community or more. The Communities include: SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS, UMA, ECCAS, IGAD and mostly recently CEN-SAD.

Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution:

I should also mention that as part of the renewed efforts of the OAU to assume its responsibilities in the changing global context, the 29th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Cairo in June 1993, decided to establish a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This followed the recommendations, which I, as Secretary General of OAU, had submitted earlier at the OAU Summit in Dakar, Senegal in 1992.

In adopting the Declaration, African Leaders were reaffirming their commitment to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts. It was also a clear affirmation by the leaders that one of the most serious impediments to Africa's development was the scourge of conflicts.

Towards the African Union

When African Heads of State and Government met in the 4th Extra-Ordinary Summit, in Sirte, Libya, they had all these developments in mind. They were also conscious of the lamentable fact that despite some progress made in certain areas there was still a very wide gap between their decisions, declarations and resolutions and their actual implementation. A few examples suffice to illustrate this state of affairs.

Despite repeated calls for intensifying economic cooperation and trade among African countries, formal intra African trade remains a miniscule 5% compared to Africa's trade with the rest of the world. While the OAU charter identified Transport and Communication as one of the

important areas, the real situation continues to be far from satisfactory. It is still more often than not, easier to travel from some African countries to others through Europe than proceeding directly. Conflicts continues to cause havoc in the continent as exemplified in the situations in Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone (at that time), Burundi, DRC, Central African Republic. Our continent still has the dubious distinction of having the largest number of refugees and displaced persons. Human rights violations abound and to compound the situation we have to face the catastrophic HIV-AIDS Pandemic.

The Sirte Declaration was proclaimed on 9 September 1999. The Declaration pronounced the decision to establish the African Union.

- ◆ The Declaration specifically reiterates and reaffirms the essence of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and calls for its accelerated implementation – by shortening the period of bringing it into being, speedily establishing all its

institutions, and the strengthening and consolidation of the Regional Economic Communities.

- ◆ The immediate operationalization of the Sirte Declaration involved its Legal Instrument which came to be known as the Constitutive Act, and taking it through the process of entering into force.
- ◆ Indeed, in the whole history of Conventions and Protocols of the OAU there has been no instrument that has moved so rapidly through the signing and ratification process as the Constitutive Act of the African Union.
- ◆ The Ordinary Summit following the Sirte Declaration held in Lome, Togo adopted the Constitutive Act on 11 July 2000 and immediately after, the signing process ensued.
- ◆ By the 2nd of March 2001, at the 5th Extra-Ordinary Summit held in Sirte, Libya, all the OAU Member States had signed the Constitutive Act, many had also ratified it, and only a few ratifications were remaining to allow for its entry into force. The Summit also

approved the Protocol establishing the Pan-African Parliament which is among the institutions of the African Union.

- ◆ By April 25th 2001, at a time when we had an Extra-Ordinary Summit in Abuja on HIV-AIDS, Tuberculosis and other Infectious diseases, the required 2/3rd ratifications were obtained, and one month later, on 26 May 2001, the Constitutive Act entered into force;
- ◆ By the time the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government convened in Lusaka, Zambia, from 9 – 12 July, most of the OAU Member States had ratified the Constitutive Act.
- ◆ Indeed, at the Lusaka Summit, the main preoccupation was in considering the operational modalities of launching the Union, particularly in terms of the key institutional structures;
- ◆ As of 29 January, 2001, 46 OAU out of 53 had ratified the Constitutive Act and deposited their instruments of ratification at OAU Headquarters. Only 7 countries have yet either to ratify or deposit their instruments of

ratification. These are Cameroon, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa), Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Mauritania.

- ◆ The speed and enthusiasm demonstrated in approving and ratifying the legal instrument of the African Union was an indication of the commitment and determination to achieving a closer unity among the African people.

The OAU Versus The African Union

The important question, at this juncture, is what is the difference between the OAU and the African Union? For, obviously, the African Union cannot and should not be simply the OAU with a different nomenclature.

The African Union is:

- ◆ A fusion of the OAU Charter and the Abuja Treaty;
- ◆ An elevated framework of integration – with 17 Organs, including operational ones such as Financial Institutions (The African Central Bank,

The African Monetary Fund and The African Investment Bank) and the Pan-African Parliament;

- ◆ Promotes a synergy between Continental dynamism (reminiscent of the period of the liberation struggles) and Regional
- ◆ While essentially retaining the sovereignty of Member States, it broadens the scope of integration;
- ◆ It reinvigorates the agenda of Pan-Africanism by addressing the current challenges facing the Continent;
- ◆ New issues are embedded, such as peace, security and stability; democratisation; human rights; science and technology;
- ◆ The people, rather than simply states and structures, are made to be at the centre of the Union. It should be noted for example, that among the principles of the Union are promotion of gender equality; promotion of social justice, respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law

and good governance and respect for the sanctity of life.

The Signing and ratification by almost all OAU Member States of the Constitutive Act which elaborates these ideals is affirmation that Africa is ready and committed to embark into a new level of integration.

Period of Transition

The Lusaka Summit has designated a One Year Transition period – which will be up to the next OAU summit – during which the OAU Secretary General has to complete the basic tasks of launching the key Organs of the Union, so that the African Union can be operational by July next year.

During this one year period the General Secretariat, working closely with Member States, has to deal with all the institutional requirements for the convening of the African Union Assembly, Executive Council, as well as the full functioning the Union Commission (which replaces the

General Secretariat) and the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

The General Secretariat also has to undertake the task of popularizing the Union and to ensure that the people of Africa identify with its ideals and objectives.

Other tasks during the transition period include: defining the most efficient operational linkage with the Regional Economic Communities that are the building blocs of the Union and providing a proper place and role for the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and all its components such as the Early Warning System and the Central Organ.

Also to be addressed is the modality of financing the Union – that can overcome the problems encountered by the OAU, and also enable the Union to discharge its responsibilities which have increased in scope compared to those of the OAU. What is clear is that the African Union

cannot depend merely on annual financial contributions of its member states.

Apart from the structural and organizational tasks, there is the challenge of developing a strategic programme for the Union that will grow incrementally leading to the realization of the objectives of the African Union.

In considering the scope of such a programme, there will also be the need to clarify the responsibility of the union in the maintenance of peace, security and stability in the continent.

Similarly, such formidable challenges as combating HIV-AIDS and other major pandemics; coping with disasters; ensuring food security; regulating trans-migration; dealing with multilateral negotiations – can constitute the initial portfolio of the Union.

With regard to the future of the African Union – at this stage one can only conjecture!

Of course, the vision about the future of this Continent is very clear. It was propounded by the Founding Fathers of the African Union – and it has been sharpened and revitalized since then.

The Role of the Military

The constitutive act refers to the establishment of a common defence policy in the African Continent. It also provides for the right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and stability. The right of the Union to intervene in situations like genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity is also stipulated. Clearly this involves military and security contribution. There is yet no clear definition on how this is to be achieved.

But even if these significant provisions were not included in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, experience has demonstrated that Africa has to get more and more involved in matters affecting the security and stability of the continent.

Indeed this is now generally accepted within the continent. This is a far cry from the situation that prevailed ten years ago when there was great reluctance and indeed even outright opposition to any idea of the OAU or African States getting involved in peace keeping operations under the umbrella of the OAU or a regional organization.

It is to be recalled in Dakar, Senegal, when The Secretary of the OAU presented recommendations for the establishment of a mechanism of conflict prevention, management and resolution and suggested that Africa has to be prepared and should equip itself for peace keeping operations when this becomes necessary, the very idea of a mechanism was almost killed because of the vociferous opposition of many member states which felt that this should be an exclusive domain of the United Nations. In order to achieve a consensus we settled on the possibility of Peace Support Missions.

A lot however, has happened in the past ten years. With the end of cold war, there was less and less interest on the

part of the major powers to get involved in African conflicts. There has also been some reluctance in getting The Blue Berrets involved. The genocide in Rwanda and the reluctance of international community to act and do so swiftly also served as a lesson to Africa. Hence the turn about with greater emphasis on relying on African forces either under UN Security Council direction or its mandate. The conflict in Liberia and the crucial of ECOMOG demonstrates Africa's capacity to deal with difficult crises despite resources limitation. By 1995, the Heads of State meeting in Addis Ababa recognized the importance of Africa's prepadness. This led to their decision to have standby arrangements whereby every country in a position to do so was to earmark a contingent ready to be deployed in case of need. You are also familiar with the Unites States African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) and France's RECAMP as well As Britain's role in assisting some African States in the area of peace keeping. Some other European countries have also made same offers - all aimed at augmenting Africa's capacity at conflict resolution including in particular in the area of peace keeping.

The Chiefs of General Staff of African Armed Forces have also deliberated on the issue and made a number of serious recommendations. What all this implies is greater African involvement in the area of conflict resolution including the deployment of inter position forces. Clearly therefore in the months and years ahead and especially within the context of the African Union the role of Africa's Military Forces in this domain is bound to be strengthened. The Armed forces will also be required to play an increased role in coping with Africa's natural disaster situations.

Conclusion

Whatever the imperfections of the proposed African Union, it is here to stay. The principles and objectives of the Union are very clear. They include the improvement of lot of our people through intensified economic cooperation and integration; preservation and promotion of peace, security and stability; democratisation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments; respect for human rights and rule of

law, ensuring that every individual be part of society and assuring that the continent has its rightful position in the international arena. Above all, a more cohesive and united Africa is the only viable response to cope with the vagaries and opportunities of globalisation.

To achieve these lofty and far reaching objectives and adhere to the principles involved is not going to be an easy exercise. Nor is it going to plain sailing. The tasks ahead are formidable and the challenges enormous. Each one of us has an important role to play. I firmly believe that we have no other serious alternative.