



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY,
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, AT THE SILVER JUBILEE
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST
AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS) - ABUJA, NIGERIA,
28 MAY, 2000**

Mr. Chairman,

**Your Excellencies Heads of State
and Government,**

Honourable Ministers,

**Distinguished Executive Secretary
of ECOWAS, and Executive Secretaries
of other Regional Economic Communities,**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this occasion of the Silver Jubilee anniversary of the Economic Community of West African States, I would like to convey warm congratulations to the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, Governments of the Member States and to the people of this region. It is a pleasure for me to be part of this momentous event whose joy is shared throughout our Continent. Indeed during the 25 years of its existence, ECOWAS has not only served as a vehicle for pursuing the political and socio-economic interests of the People of West Africa, but it has contributed immensely to consolidating the Continental efforts on regional cooperation and integration.

I would like to pay special tribute to the Heads of State of ECOWAS whose commitment and dedication to the cause of integration have led to the sustenance and consolidation of this important institution. Through their spirit of solidarity and commitment to collective action they have been able to steer this Organization

through formidable obstacles leading to the impressive successes we are seeing today.

To the people of the West African region, whose actions and interactions have been inspirational and have encouraged a climate conducive for the nurturing and promoting the structures of cooperation, I convey warm congratulations to them. Their positive disposition to the dynamics of cooperation and integration has been an important factor in the various endeavours pursued by ECOWAS. It is with a sense of pride and optimism that the rest of Africa has been following the progress being made in this region.

For the staff of the General Secretariat of ECOWAS, the devotion they have demonstrated in the 25 years of the Organization's existence has been an invaluable asset for attaining its objectives. Their commitment to the spirit of cooperation and integration, their high sense of duty and professionalism, and their dedication to the cause of Pan-Africanism have contributed to the enhancement of a closer working relationship with the Secretariat of our Continental Organization.

Celebrating a Silver Jubilee of ECOWAS is not only an occasion marking the success of the West African region, but it is also a testimony to the determination of the African People as a whole to forge greater unity, solidarity and cooperation. We in Africa had embarked on the path of mobilizing our collective strength in

pursuit of a common destiny at the very inception of our respective nationhood. We realized right at that early stage that our survival and development depend on our collective action. It is for this reason that the Organization of African Unity was created, and that its Charter put a strong emphasis on our collective interests and common endeavours.

The challenges facing our Continent as we enter the new millennium increasingly reaffirm the wisdom and foresight of the Founding Fathers of our Continental Organization that it is only through working together, in a spirit of solidarity, can we be able to build a prosperous and dynamic Africa which enjoys peace, security and stability, and whose people pursue their developmental endeavours in harmony and tranquility. Indeed, in this era of globalization, no single nation can succeed on its own. It is only through integrated action can we be able to engage effectively in the global system.

Recognizing the imperative of globalization and the need for enhancing Africa's capacity of engaging within the world system does not negate the fact that the primary logic of integration for us lies within the Continent itself. It is the quest to forge a stronger common identity among the African Peoples, increase their productivity and effectiveness, harness their competitive advantages, and surmount their common challenges that constitutes the essence and rationale for integration in our Continent.

It is in this respect that I wish to pay special tribute to the Economic Community of West African States for the progress made in promoting a closer interaction among the peoples of this region. Indeed, this is the only region in our Continent, today, where the people are free to move freely across national borders without visas and without the fear of mass expulsion, as illegal immigrants. This is, by no means, an insignificant achievement which emphasizes the undisputed fact that people should be at the centre of the integration effort.

Similarly, the achievements in the transport and communication sector, trade, energy and the recent decision on monetary cooperation are both significant and encouraging. I am particularly happy to note that a decision has been taken to set in motion a fast track module in an effort to accelerate the integration process. This decision, with its foresightedness, underscores the fact that a few countries that are prepared can, indeed, spearhead joint initiatives that others can join at a later stage.

The challenge of promoting peace, security and stability has been a burning issue for our Leaders, our Governments, and the people of our Continent. The unity and solidarity demonstrated by the leaders and peoples of this region in pursuing this endeavour, particularly in dealing with the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone have been exemplary, not only to the Continent of Africa, but to the entire world. It only confirms the old adage that where there is a will

there is always a way. The role of ECOMOG remains a source of inspiration in Africa's quest to deal with crisis situations.

Only less than three weeks ago, I had the opportunity of participating here in Abuja in an emergency Summit of the ECOWAS Heads of State members of the Joint Implementation Committee of the Lome Peace Agreement on Sierra Leone. At that Summit a profound sense of unity and solidarity was demonstrated and far-reaching decisions were made in dealing with the latest crisis in Sierra Leone, where among other things, the United Nations Peace-keepers were held hostage by the RUF. The OAU will continue to work closely with ECOWAS and the UN in our joint efforts to try to end the despicable acts of terrorism, mayhem and destruction committed by the rebels and work for the implementation of the Lome Peace Agreement. Clearly, the total and unconditional release of all the UN Peace-keepers held hostage by the RUF remains our priority concern. In this context, I wish to pay tribute to President Charles Ghanky Taylor of Liberia for the commendable efforts that he has personally deployed to secure the release of UNAMSIL personnel and encourage him to continue with those efforts until all the hostages are released. We, at the OAU, will also continue to work closely with ECOWAS towards the attainment of sustainable peace, security and stability throughout our Continent.

This close working relationship is now even more pertinent as we pool all our efforts towards the establishment of the African Union and accelerate the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, as pronounced in the historic Sirte Declaration of 9/9/99. Being institutions that are the pillars of Continental integration and also being much closer to the operational ground, the Regional Economic Communities such as ECOWAS have an important role to play in bringing about the proposed African Union.

This Silver Jubilee of ECOWAS is therefore more than a celebration of achievements. It is also an occasion marking the coming of age of an institution that assumes higher challenges and elevated responsibilities. The region and the Continent as a whole have reached a conjuncture that demands an upward thrust in their endeavours. By the vitality and determination demonstrated by the Leaders, the Governments and the People of this region in the past 25 years of the existence of ECOWAS, I firmly believe that these challenges will be overcome and a brighter future for Africa and all its peoples will be unraveled.

I thank you.