



Organization of African Unity

**69th Ordinary Session of the
Council of Ministers**

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General**

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- **Mr. Chairman,**
- **Honourable Ministers and
Heads of Delegation,**
- **Distinguished Deputy Executive Secretary of the
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to welcome you all to the 69th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers. I would like, from the outset, to express my appreciation to the outgoing Chairman of Council, Mr. Youssouf Ouedraogo, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, and his predecessor, Mr. Ablasse Ouedraogo, for the commendable efforts they deployed during their tenure of office. I wish also to congratulate in advance, the incoming Chairman of Council and his Bureau and assure them of the fullest co-operation of the General Secretariat in the discharge of their functions.

This 69th Ordinary Session of Council is expected to be mainly devoted to the consideration of financial, budgetary and administrative matters, as well as to socio-economic issues of concern to the Organization. Nonetheless, given the fact that this session is being held against the background of a disturbing proliferation of conflicts in the Continent, I believe that Council would wish to address at least some of them as it deliberates on the various items included in its agenda. In this context, I have extensively referred to the

conflict situations in the Introductory Note to my Report which has already been circulated to Council.

On the financial situation of the Organization, and as Council is aware, we witnessed a considerable improvement over the three financial years between 1994 and 1997. This improvement came about partly as a direct result of the implementation of the sanctions imposed against defaulting countries since 1994. Indeed, starting from the 1994/1995 financial year, there was an encouraging trend in which Member States made determined efforts to pay their arrears and honour their obligations towards the regular budget. However, this positive development was reversed during the 1997/1998 financial year when Member States relaxed to some degree in their efforts to meet their financial commitments to the Organization. This situation has continued to prevail during the current financial year.

I wish to seize this opportunity to urge Member States to rekindle the spirit and commitment which they earlier demonstrated. While I appeal to them to honour their commitments, I am fully aware of the financial constraints our Member States are experiencing in the light of the daunting socio-economic difficulties which they face. Yet, I believe that when there is the commitment, the required resources, which are after all modest, could be mobilized. I wish, in this respect, to pay special tribute to the Member States which have been paying their financial contributions to the Organization, regularly and on time. Thanks to the commitment and dedication of these

Member States, the Organization has benefitted from a relatively sustained cash flow over the past years. Indeed, they have been a source of strength for the Organization in its efforts to carry out its programmes and meet its financial obligations.

I believe however, that it is only fair that the burden should be equitably shared by all the Member States. I earnestly hope, therefore, that all Member States will assume their financial commitments towards the Organization.

Thirty-six years ago, the Organization of African Unity was established as an Organization to promote freedom, unity, solidarity, understanding and co-operation among African States and to defend the interests of the Continent and its people. In the new African and international context, the Organization is called upon to play an even greater role. One of its major agenda is the establishment of the African Economic Community. Despite its limited resources, the Secretariat has been doing its utmost to carry out its mandate in connection with the establishment of the Community. Efforts are being made to co-ordinate and harmonize the activities of the Regional Economic Communities. These efforts have not always been crowned with success as the conditions in some of the Regional Economic Communities are not yet fully conducive to economic co-operation and integration.

Parallel to our efforts related to the building of the African Economic Community, the Secretariat is also assuming its advocacy role in promoting and defending the collective interests of our Member States. In that regard, we have been supporting the position of the Member States in global negotiations such as those between the ACP and the EU and within the World Trade Organization.

The Organization has also been actively involved in undertakings aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in the Continent. In this respect, the scourge of conflicts which afflicts our countries has been and continues to be our major concern. Whether acting directly, or in collaboration with regional and international institutions, the OAU has been as active as possible in promoting peaceful solutions to conflicts in the Continent. In the process, the Organization has endeavoured to provide a continental and African approach and perspective to regional and international initiatives with which it is associated.

Since the last session of Council, the Organization has focused its attention on the grave situations developing in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone, the Comoros, between Ethiopia and Eritrea and in other areas such as Somalia, Burundi and Guinea Bissau. Regarding the situation in the DRC, the OAU has been playing an active role in support of regional efforts aimed at seeking a lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict, which unfortunately, has assumed grave proportions. I wish to put

on record my profound appreciation to the leaders of the Region for their untiring efforts to bring about peace in the DRC and the Region. I wish in particular to pay tribute to the President of Zambia, Mr. Frederick Chiluba who has been co-ordinating the regional efforts and with whom I have been in continuous contacts and consultation. I also wish to underscore the contribution of the United Nations especially through its Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan in our joint efforts aimed at ending the conflict in the DRC. It is obvious that all of us – the countries of the Region, including the regional organization, SADC, the OAU and the United Nations - need to redouble our efforts in order to end this tragic conflict and to do so on the basis of the fundamental principles of the OAU and the United Nations.

In Angola, we are extremely distressed at the resumption of a full scale civil war. The intransigence and irresponsibility of the UNITA leadership and especially of Jonas Savimbi as characterized by the persistent violation of the Lusaka Protocol has led to this. Africa and the international community at large must intensify their efforts to bring to an end this war, by *inter alia* ensuring the full and scrupulous implementation of sanctions, imposed by the United Nations Security Council against UNITA.

We have been following closely the situation in Sierra Leone and supporting the efforts of the ECOWAS countries and ECOMOG, aimed at promoting a solution to the crisis based on the support of the elected

Government of President Tijan Kabbah and the promotion of dialogue and negotiations as the most definitive way to end the crisis.

The situation in the Comoros, and in particular the separatist threat in Anjouan, continues to pose a challenge to the Organization. With the active role of the countries of the region, the Organization has done all it can to promote an early and peaceful solution to the crisis. Despite these efforts, the situation in the Comoros, I am afraid, is becoming more complicated. It is my fervent hope that all the parties in that country will seize the opportunity of the forthcoming Inter Islands Comorian Conference, scheduled to be held in Antananarivo, Madagascar to rise above their partisan interests and agree on a new institutional framework, which will take into account the legitimate aspirations of all the Islands and their population while preserving the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros.

Regarding the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Organization, through its High Level Delegation, has invested a great deal of energy and effort in striving to seek a peaceful solution to this unfortunate crisis. The peace proposals submitted to the parties by the OAU High Level Delegation were welcomed by the international community at large as fair and balanced. In submitting these proposals, the first and foremost consideration was to avoid the resumption of hostilities by providing the basis for a peaceful settlement. It is a matter of profound regret, that despite the OAU's efforts which were supported by the international community, the war resumed with

greater intensity between the two countries, with its attendant loss of life and destruction and its complicating consequences for the peace process. Since the resumption of hostilities, the OAU High Level Delegation, has been calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a return to the peace process, based on the implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement. I wish to make use of this occasion to reiterate the appeal for an immediate ending to the fighting and the implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement. The OAU will continue with its efforts and will do its utmost to achieve this goal.

The OAU has been following closely developments regarding the crisis between Libya and the USA and the UK. As Council is aware, this issue has been a source of concern to our Organization over the past years. The OAU together with the League of Arab States had, at some point, put forward proposals aimed at promoting a just and peaceful solution to the crisis. The Secretary General of the United Nations has been very active in seeking a solution to the problem. President Mandela of South Africa also deployed commendable efforts in this regard.

It was, therefore, with a sense of relief and satisfaction that we welcomed the recent agreement announced during the visit of President Mandela to Libya. This agreement which has been confirmed by Libya's communication to the UN Secretary General unblocks the long-standing Lockerbie issue through the holding of a fair trial of the suspects and removal

of sanctions which have caused considerable suffering to the Libyan people. In welcoming these positive developments, I would like to recognize the persistent and constructive role played by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in efforts towards resolving the crisis.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is evident that all efforts by our Organization have not always led to the desired results, in spite of our determination to succeed. Clearly however, the will of Africa and its leaders to address conflict situations continues to prevail despite the difficulties encountered. It is a fact that these conflict situations are not easy to resolve. More often than not, they are complicated by various factors of internal and external dimension. Furthermore, our Organization and Continent are not endowed with the necessary resources to tackle these crises speedily and effectively. The challenge of conflicts in the Continent emphasizes, therefore, the need for the enhancement of capacity-building at the national, regional and continental levels.

At the continental level, the Organization has been provided with a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, which has been in operation since 1993. This Mechanism has proved to be useful although its methods of work need to be reviewed and its resources augmented. This question of the efficacy of the Mechanism is part and parcel

of the whole issue of the enhancement of the capacity of the Organization to discharge the responsibilities entrusted to it. It is in that context that I wish to situate the ongoing process of the restructuring of the General Secretariat, which aims at equipping the Organization with the capacity to function effectively and efficiently.

The present session of Council is expected to consider this important matter. Indeed, Council is seized with the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Structural Reform, which is the outcome of years of discussion among the members of the Committee with the input of other Heads of Mission in Addis Ababa. As I have had the occasion to state in the past, every restructuring exercise is painful; but, our Organization, like similar institutions, cannot do without such an exercise which aims at adjusting its structure and adapting it to the new realities and modern methods of work.

In the course of this process, which has been long and difficult, many views have been expressed on the broad range of issues covered, some of which will have a direct impact on the careers and lives of staff members and are of direct interest to Member States. At the end of the day, however, the Report of the Committee is the outcome of the broadest possible consensus among its members. In this regard, the additional views expressed during the meeting of Ambassadors and other Plenipotentiaries have been very useful in terms of enriching the debate and in further broadening that consensus.

As Council deliberates on this important and sensitive issue, it is my hope and expectation that the interest of the Organization will remain paramount and that the need to come out with a new, functional and dynamic Secretariat, which can better serve the Organization and its Member States, will be our guiding principle.

Mr. Chairman, as we prepare to enter the new millennium, we should endeavour together to build a new Secretariat based on the highest international standards possible, enabling it to support the Organization and the Continent to assume their rightful place in the comity of nations. Let us pursue this objective together, with courage and determination. I am confident that Council will live up to this challenge.