



Organization of African Unity

**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
SIXTY-SECOND ORDINARY SESSION**

**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL
H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM**

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Mr. Chairman,

I wish to begin by joining the Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia Ato Tamrat Layne in wishing you all a warm welcome to Addis Ababa and to wish this Council, successful deliberations.

In the course of the last six months, the Council has been privileged to have the services of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malawi, the Hon. BWANALI as its Chairman. I am sure, I shall be echoing the sentiments of the entire Council if I state that Minister Bwanali has discharged his responsibilities with great professional competence and commitment. I wish to congratulate him most sincerely for a job well done. I also look forward to working closely with the New Chairman of Council and his colleagues in the Bureau. They can be assured of the full cooperation of the General Secretariat.

Mr. Chairman,

In the introduction to my report already circulated to Your Excellencies in Document CM/1889 (LXII) I address issues now facing the continent and which, in my opinion, merit the particular attention of the Council. Suffice it at this point therefore, to share with Your Excellencies my views on some of those issues I consider requiring immediate attention.

Mr. Chairman,

Your Council is reconvening at a time of great challenges on the continent. We still face the scourge of conflicts in Somalia, Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone, even if we are encouraged by the developments in Angola where there is now a clear opening for peace. Rwanda is still struggling to come to terms with its sad history of genocide and massacres which took place last year. But there are very disturbing reports of rearming and military training of the former Rwandese Government Forces and those of the Interahamwe. These reports also talk of war preparations. This ominous development should be taken seriously because of its serious implications not only for peace and stability in Rwanda and Burundi but also in the entire sub-region. In the meantime, the scourge of refugees is still menacing the continent. Economically, our countries persist in restructuring and reform. And while there are indications that the new policies are beginning to bear fruit, the continent is far from emerging from the woods.

The process of democratization is taking root as many countries have sought to strengthen political pluralism and the regime of multiparty elections. Popular participation and the promotion of human rights are increasingly being accepted as essential ingredients of good governance inherent in a functioning democracy.

The world economic situation is getting more complex with globalization and Africa still has to pick up the momentum to cope with the new challenge of an emerging global economy. This is therefore an opportunity for deep reflection on where Africa stands and how it can face the challenges before it. The agenda before the continent is engaging and it demands innovative ways of thinking and doing business. Africa cannot afford a business-as-usual-attitude when it is surrounded by challenges of monumental proportions.

This new sense of urgency is made necessary also by the tense relations and simmering conflicts, I see emerging between a number of countries. This sense of political uncertainty is undermining continental solidarity and diminishing our capacity for collective action. We therefore need to see how these tensions can be defused and how we can promote cooperation among our countries and undertake joint action on the issues we all face together. We need to strengthen our arrangements for consultation within the framework of the OAU including that of the Mechanism for conflict resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

It has been two years since the Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts was adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. In the course of this period, we have tested the Mechanism to actual conflicts and we can confidently say that we have seen its usefulness. Of course, we have also seen its deficiencies and limitations. One thing has however become quite clear - that the establishment of the Mechanism was critical and timely. During the last two sessions of this Council, I have spoken of the experience we have gathered in the functioning of the Mechanism; and of the need to continually adjust it to changing requirements of the continent. I believe that, as the Mechanism is applied more resolutely, it will expand and develop to cope with the tasks of dealing with conflicts. But the Mechanism is only an instrument which will make difference if it is supported and used. For this reason, our belief in the Mechanism and our readiness to use it, is critical in its development. The Mechanism needs political support as it does resources. We cannot expect the Mechanism to be effective if it is left without the resources to work with. At the last session of Council, I spoke of the need to support the Peace Fund so as to create an adequate resource base which is not dependent on external funding for operational costs. I believe the Council will take time to reflect on how the issue of resources

can be comprehensively dealt with. My concern persists that if we allow the present situation to continue and predicate the bulk of the operations of the Mechanism upon external funding, we will be creating conditions to undermine its efficiency and independence in the long run.

Mr. Chairman,

Apart from the questions of political support and funding for the Mechanism, experience has also shown that Africa needs to develop its in-house capacity to deal with the needs of troop deployment to help in the management of conflicts whenever it becomes necessary. In Cairo, two years ago, the Summit was emphatic in its declaration by stating that peace-keeping is primarily the responsibility of the United Nations. The Summit did however envisage some role for the OAU in limited missions of peace observation or of being associated with the United Nations in peace-keeping. In the last two years, we have come to see the acute limitations which we have as a continent even to be helpful to the United Nations. We have equally seen how circumstances have dictated that we be involved in matters beyond mere peace observations. In Rwanda, we saw how Africa like the rest of the world stood helplessly by as genocide and massacres were being perpetrated. Even when in the aftermath of the genocide, Africa was called upon to contribute personnel to UNAMIR II it took considerable time before

the troops were deployed on the ground. In both instances, we lost critical time which could have made difference to the lives of the innocent civilians in Rwanda.

In Burundi we are at present engaged in a peace observation which was put together under emergency circumstances and without a clear structural system within the OAU for such tasks. And as the tasks of peace observation become more complex and demanding greater political clarity, we shall have to adapt the Mechanism to face these realities.

I believe, therefore, that while the Cairo Declaration must remain our guiding principle time has come to see how we can meet the new challenges we face. The need to develop an African peace-keeping capacity, which we can readily put at the disposal of the UN or in exceptional circumstances when need arises that of the OAU, is now quite apparent. In the past, I have spoken of ready contingents in the military establishments of Member States. This is one option of building that capacity I speak of. In the wisdom of the Council, other options can be explored addressing at the same time, matters of cost including finance and logistics and political implications.

Mr. Chairman,

One positive effect of the establishment of the Mechanism, is the enthusiasm it has generated outside Africa. We have had financial and material support for the operations of the Mechanism from a number of non-African countries. Along these, we have also had a number of initiatives from outside the continent, aimed at helping Africa further in the application of the Mechanism to the resolution of conflicts. Our Member States have been associated with many of these initiatives. This is good and welcome. At the same time however, we need to be clear with ourselves that we do not disperse our efforts and resources by pursuing parallel initiatives. We should also ensure that we do not, by omission, find ourselves working at cross purposes simply because we did not take the care to consult adequately, to reflect on these programs and harmonize our efforts. It is my hope therefore that Council will take time, to look at all these developments and see how they all can be synchronized with the agenda of the Mechanism and bring greater support to it. This is as desirable to Africa as it is to those from outside the continent who want to be supportive.

Mr. Chairman,

Our countries are still reeling from the effects of a bad economic climate in the continent. The bold economic structural adjustment programs which our countries are currently implementing have shown modest results in terms of slowing economic decline. In some instances they have brought modest growth. But by and large we still have to see their full benefits.

What is clear at the moment is that the process of implementing these programs has brought about immense hardships to the general population as governments have had to withdraw from public welfare spending. Lower public spending has meant lesser access to the basic amenities like health care, education, drinking water and shelter.

The process of economic liberalization and privatization has brought about increased private sector participation in the economies. This has had positive effect even that of jolting the remaining public sector into better management and increased efficiency. While all this is good in the long run, I am concerned that as government abandons public spending, the institution of the state also weakens. If this process of the weakening of the state is not controlled, it could have adverse consequences to social order.

I therefore believe that as we pursue these programs, we should take measures to ensure that they do not lead to social polarization with all the possible implications.

Particularly, we should look at the implications of the widening income gap between the poor and rich within our countries. As we do so, measures should also be taken to create social safety nets to those vulnerable segments of society which find themselves economically disenfranchised by the reforms and restructuring.

Mr. Chairman,

The continuation of internal efforts at instituting sound macro-economic policies, promoting efficiency, productivity and stimulating growth and inflow of international resources, will contribute to short and medium term development. In the long run however, Africa will have to work more resolutely on the agenda of continental integration as a basis of sustainable development.

It is a year since the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community entered into force. I am concerned that the enthusiasm that was evident at Abuja when the Treaty was signed in 1991 seem to have lost its momentum. The Treaty ratification process has slowed and work on the various protocols to the Treaty is not advancing at the desired pace. The continuing lack of clarity on the relationship between COMESA and the Southern Africa Development is not helpful. Equally, the continuing fiscal crisis facing ECCAS is undermining the cause of regional integration in Central Africa. There is also a number of new economic and monetary groupings which are being created to spearhead regional and sub-regional integration in various parts of the continent. We need to see how these will interface with the African Economic Community and that they do not hamper its full establishment.

I cannot conclude before referring myself to the financial situation of the Organization. I have been particularly encouraged by the efforts made in the last four months by many Member States to clear their arrears of contributions either partially or in full. This is a commendable development. I wish to thank Member States for this new disposition to pay and to urge them to sustain the momentum. I see in this new disposition a clear manifestation of renewed commitment of Member States to the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

Conflict resolution and economic development are the two of the most important challenges which need the urgent attention of the Council. We can no longer be despondent about the fate of the continent. On the contrary, we need to act together purposefully. We have the Mechanism for Conflict Resolution and the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Both are instruments of Africa to extricate itself from the conflicts and under-development - two evils which hold Africa back. These instruments should be strengthened, consolidated and expanded. Africa has taken the crucial step of setting them up. It is now important that Africa demonstrates its unqualified belief in them, to use them as instruments of self-liberation. Africa can do it. All we need is to summon the courage and will to pursue the objectives of peace and development in the Continent.

I thank you.