



Organization of African Unity

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU TO THE SIXTY-THIRD  
ORDINARY SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

February 26, 1996

**Mr. Chairman,**

I would like to join the distinguished Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, H.E. Ato Tamrat Layne in welcoming you all to Addis Ababa.

This 63rd Session of Council is taking place at a propitious occasion when the people of Ethiopia are celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Adwa. The victory of the Ethiopian patriots over Italian fascism was not a victory for the Ethiopian people only but symbolised Africa's resistance to colonial rule and domination. Indeed, the battle of Adwa should be seen in the context of Africa's tenacious resistance against colonialism, racism and foreign domination.

The victory at Adwa one hundred years ago represents one of the finest moments in the history of Ethiopia's resistance to foreign occupation and the determination of its people to uphold their freedom and dignity. I am sure Council will join me in conveying to the Government and people of Ethiopia our best wishes as they celebrate this important and historic victory for Ethiopia and Africa as a whole.

Your Council is convening against the background of continuing change in the Continent and the rest of the world. In the Continent we continue to see determined efforts by our governments and people to stay the course of economic and political reforms. The process of democratization is consolidating and more and more multiparty democratic elections are being held. And even in those countries where there have been reversals of civilian rule, we still continue to see renewed determination to restore democratic rule. I believe that this determination will translate itself into concrete programmes to return these countries to civilian democratic rule in the nearest future.

Our countries have also continued to grapple with the challenge of peace and stability in the Continent. The resolution of conflicts and the creation of conditions conducive to long term peace and stability in the Continent has continued to engage our Member States - whether individually or collectively through our Organization.

Conflicts are still ravaging our societies. In Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and in Burundi, we are still faced with the challenge of helping these countries retrieve themselves from the senseless cycle of violence which has gripped them. When I speak of the cycle of violence it is not to belittle the efforts which even under these difficult circumstances, have been

expended and the encouraging results they promise. Indeed, even in these countries we see encouraging signs of positive evolution of events which need to be nurtured and steered towards peaceful settlement of the conflicts.

In Liberia, I am encouraged by the holding of the Abuja Agreement but remain very much preoccupied by the likelihood of a stalemate as the lingering political difficulties among the parties are given further impetus by the uncertainties in the implementation process created by the lack of financing. Liberia is one case where Africa has shown example of leadership and sacrifice. In spite of limited means, the countries of the region supported by the OAU, have been able to sustain a costly political and military initiative which now promises to bring an end to the conflict in that country. All along we were urged to demonstrate commitment, to show that Africa also cares for its people before others can be motivated to help. If the world needs an example then Liberia is a very good one. Yet, Africa has not received commensurate support from the international community. Many promises have gone unfulfilled and today, the Abuja Agreement stands in danger of being undermined by the lack of resources to carry out the tasks of encampment and disarmament which are critical to a peaceful settlement. I therefore wish to urge our Member States to come forth with the necessary financial and logistical support to the peace



process in Liberia. Equally, the international community needs to demonstrate its practical support to the peace process there by added financial assistance.

The situation in Burundi remains precarious though the recent developments do give some hope that if the political forces in the country rose beyond their narrow selfish interests and put those of their people first, a solution to the conflict is possible. We continue to see the role of the OAU as being facilitative. We are determined to continue, through our operations under the OAU Mission in Burundi, as well as through political consultations to urge the people of Burundi to strive to restore confidence and cast away the curse of violence which is now wrecking the country. Of course, as we emphasize the political option to resolve the conflict, we see it being inextricably linked to the role of the political forces in the country to move away from extremism and closer to dialogue and mutual accommodation.

The people of Burundi have the primary responsibility for peace and stability in their country. We, and the rest of the international community can only help with our ideas, understanding and indeed resources, but we cannot replace the Burundi people in fostering peace in their country.

It is however crucial for all political and other actors in the Burundi body-politic to recognize and understand the importance and urgency of taking seriously the challenge of dialogue and reconciliation and move away from the path of violence, extremism and destruction. They must not over tax the patience of the international community. Above all they should not underestimate the legitimate concern of Africa and the rest of the world at the uncertain and more often than not very disturbing and dangerous security situation.

The leaders of Burundi - both civilian and military - have a clear choice. They can work together and build on the recent positive developments and thus move on the rational and noble path of peace and national concord through dialogue and mutual accommodation. On the other hand, they can allow the forces of extremism to hold sway and in the process subject their country to destruction and to a very uncertain and extremely hazardous future. Africa and the world at large hope and expect that they will choose the path of reason.

In Rwanda, we welcome the efforts made by the Government towards the re-establishment of state institutions. A lot has been done to return the country to normalcy though evidently given the magnitude of the tragedy that has afflicted the people of that country and the obvious constraints both human and material, it will take time before complete

normalcy returns to the country. The challenges confronting the people and Government of Rwanda are formidable. They include the issues of justice, national reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction as well as facilitating the return of the hundreds of thousands of refugees. Africa and the international community must continue to encourage and actively support the Government and people of Rwanda towards these objectives.

Linked to the political problems in Burundi, and the legacy of violence and genocide in Rwanda, is the vexing question of the refugees and its long term implications to the Great Lakes Region. Within days, we shall be convening here in Addis Ababa the second Follow-up Meeting to the Bujumbura Conference on Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes Region which took place last year. At the meeting, we, in partnership with the UNHCR, the countries of the region, and the donor community will be looking at the implementation process of the Bujumbura Programme of Action. We hope that as the political difficulties are addressed, those of refugees, in particular their voluntary repatriation and resettlement will also be progressively resolved.

There is need to redouble our efforts as the problem of refugees is affecting those now in the camps as well as the societies in the receiving countries on whom the burden of hosting millions of people is proving unbearable, notwithstanding the traditions of charity and hospitality which

have sustained the uneasy relationship between the two groups of people. This underscores the need for urgent action. While I commend the generosity and patience of the countries of the region, and in particular Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi, we cannot expect them to continue much longer shouldering the burden of hosting the millions of refugees especially in the absence of appreciable international assistance.

In Somalia, the situation remains a source of grave concern as no tangible progress has been made on the path towards lasting peace and national reconciliation. Tension has continued to prevail with sporadic fighting in some parts of the country. I wish, once again, to appeal to the Somali leaders to restore dialogue with a view to overcoming the present stalemate. On its part, the OAU, remains ready to continue assisting the people of Somalia in the search for a durable negotiated solution to the conflict that has engulfed their country.

The Comoros are now in the midst of an adjustment process following the restoration of constitutional rule which was interrupted by a mercenary inspired and led military coup against the Government of President Djohar. I am glad to note that the timely political intervention of the OAU was able to initiate and sustain political dialogue which culminated into the Antananarivo Agreement paving the way for the return to



constitutional rule. I wish to reiterate my gratitude to all the political forces in Comoro for the confidence they reposed in the OAU by agreeing to our mediation.

I also wish to pay particular tribute to the President of Madagascar, H.E. Professor Albert Zafy for the important role he has played in contributing to the successful outcome of the Antananarivo Conference. As the country now prepares for the Presidential Elections, it is my hope that the people of the Comoros will strive to consolidate democracy, promote national understanding and cohesion and cast away the scourge of mercenarism which has bedeviled the politics of that country for so many years.

Our success in the Comoros demonstrates that our Organization has the capacity to help parties overcome political and other differences and converge into a peaceful agreement, provided the necessary confidence and political will exist. This is why I believe that our efforts in Sierra Leone hold promise only if the present positive disposition showed by the Government and the Revolutionary United Front towards peaceful settlement is sustained and deepened so that we can move on to the practical stages of dialogue and direct negotiations.

An important beginning was made yesterday in Abidjan, La Cote d'Ivoire when preliminary talks took place between the delegations of the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front. The OAU was represented in these talks as an observer. The two parties agreed to continue the talks in Yamoussoukro, La Cote d'Ivoire, on Wednesday, February 28, 1996 to consider substantive issues. In the meantime, Elections are scheduled to take place today. The OAU has been invited and has sent observers to the Elections. There is however concern that in view of the continued violence and insecurity in some parts of the country with their attendant of logistical difficulties, the process might be adversely affected. It is nonetheless our fervent hope that the path to dialogue and negotiation will continue and so will the process of democratization of the country.

As our Governments address the issues of conflicts with a view to resolving them, they will also need to deal decisively with the issues of governance, democracy and human rights. Lack of good governance, of democracy and non-observance of human rights have at times been the source of conflicts. Sometimes, these have exacerbated tensions and led to the degeneration of simmering differences into active conflicts. I note with satisfaction that as our countries persist in change, they have engendered greater growth of democracy and of the culture of respecting and promoting human rights.

As development and modernity engulf our countries, they create new challenges which require more sophisticated ways of governance able to cope with the complexities of our new emerging societies. Africa is a continent in transition. This transition is creating opportunities for constructive change and challenges of managing that change. We therefore need to ensure that in the management of that change, we strive to bring balance in society in terms of fostering democracy, observing human rights and the due process of the law as well as preserving social equality.

The balance I speak of must be leveraged upon a spirit of dialogue, tolerance and mutual accommodation capable of moving our nations and societies away from politics of exclusion and extremism and towards the consensus of the middle ground.

Finding the middle ground is therefore the challenge of governance and one which must be met if we are to plant the seeds of enduring peace in our Continent.

Another challenge of governance is the fostering of continental solidarity in tackling shared problems which require joint efforts. As technology and development generally, is bringing our people into greater contact and exposing them to the same problems, we face the challenge of joining hands to confront them. Today one country cannot insulate itself

from the problems of its neighbour and nor can one part of the continent from another. Whether it is promoting economic integration, meeting the challenge of preserving the environment or fighting desertification and drought, whether it is combating drug trafficking and terrorism, whether it is dealing with the pandemic of AIDS and Ebola fever, we need to act together, as a continent first and secondly as part of the larger community of nations.

I speak of continental solidarity because I recognize its central role in mounting effective action. I also speak of it because there are now disturbing signs that Africa is increasingly showing tendencies of succumbing to unilateral individual action. Africa is losing the zeal for joint action in the continent and even in the councils of the world. More and more we see our governments pursuing individual action for limited advantages much to the detriment of the continental solidarity which was instrumental in the successes of the years gone by. Even as we speak of the central role of the sub-regional organizations in building the Pan-African Economic Community, we unfortunately now see tendencies of neglect which are hampering the operations of some of our sub-regional organizations. In this respect, I am very preoccupied by the difficulties now facing some of our sub-regional organizations. As building blocks of the



African Economic Community, the strengthening and/or the reinforcement of the sub-regional organizations is a crucial challenge in forging ahead towards regional and continental integration.

Building the Pan-African Community is possible and a matter of necessity if Africa is going to emerge from its present economic depression and survive as a competitive entity at the global market place. We all recognize this, and our determination to do so is embodied in the Abuja Treaty which our countries signed. Yet we all know that in order for that instrument to move from the realm of the academic to the reality of an integrated community, we need to act more emphatically, with greater speed and together. We need to draw upon our shared experience of the past, rekindle continental solidarity and defeat the temptations of individual action for limited gain.

This solidarity is made all the more necessary and urgent also by the current evolution of the world economic situation. With the ushering in of the new trends at globalization under the terms of the Uruguay Rounds, Africa seems uncertain about its place and role in the new global framework. We need to know how Africa will fare in the new set up, what advantages it will get and what losses we will suffer. Equally, we need to understand how the trends at creating trading blocs in the developed world can be reconciled with the philosophy of free trade inherent in the terms of

the Uruguay Rounds. We also need to see how the heavy burden of external indebtedness which is stifling economic recovery in our countries can be lessened and how the many economic reforms we are now undertaking can be complemented by increased resource flows in terms of investment and where necessary, assistance. This is a challenge which cannot be met individually by each of our countries but together as a continent.

Among the challenges of greater immediacy in terms of needed action, is the issue of support for our Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. It is now two years since the Mechanism was created. In the course of its short life we have seen its usefulness as well as its limitations which need to be overcome. While we may have different opinions as to how the Mechanism may be made to function better or how certain things ought to be done differently, we are united in the view that it is a useful instrument. This collective view has found expression in the support that the Mechanism has continually got from the Member States. Indeed, we have found further encouragement from the support we have received from the international community. Yet as I have had opportunity to tell this esteemed Council, I continue to be preoccupied by the tenuous resource base of the Mechanism. Today, our available resources in the

Peace Fund to finance operations under the Mechanism, are dangerously low and unless we receive urgent infusion, we run the risk of closing some of our activities altogether.

In my repeated urging to the Member States to contribute to the Peace Fund, I have cautioned against over-dependence of the Mechanism on external funding to finance its operations. Yes, we need international solidarity and support. We cannot however fold our hands and expect the outside world to extend unending support.

We must address the real dangers inherent in this over-dependence of the Mechanism on outside financial support. For, unless we reverse this trend, we could lose ownership of the Mechanism and at worst, the Mechanism could fold once those benefactors decide for any reason to withdraw funding. I therefore urge this Council yet again to look at this issue critically and devise means of securing sustainable funding for the Mechanism.

This is a budgetary session. As such therefore, it needs to concentrate its time and efforts to the issues of finance and Administration of the Organization. I started by presenting an overview of the tasks before the Organization, in order to put the budget this Council will be deliberating upon, into context. Clearly, the agenda of the Continent is demanding in

terms of action by Member States and above all, in resources. Increasingly the Organization is assuming added responsibilities which need human resources and more funding.

The draft budget before this Council, is a budget of continuity - continuity in the sense that it is intended to fund ongoing programmes and activities. This year, we are meeting at this session of Council without a looming cash crisis as has been the case in the past years. This has been due to the response of the Member States to the call to honor their obligations including payment of their arrears of contributions which now stand at about \$37.5 million down from \$57 million at the beginning of this financial year.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Member States for the great efforts they have made, to pay their contributions, notwithstanding their own serious financial problems at home. But even with the improvement in cash flow to the Organization, we still need to do more to put our finances on a more secure and sustainable footing. Doing so will mean that the 17 countries which are now under sanctions will also do their utmost to clear their arrears as soon as possible.



In presenting its first biennial Programme Budget two years ago, the Secretariat raised certain fundamental issues related to the structure of the budget and the set ceiling of 10% growth rate calculated on the basis of actual expenditure.

I remain concerned that the cap on the budget growth set on the basis of the average global expenditure of the Organization does not take full account of the structure of our budget more than three quarters of which, is devoted to recurrent expenditure. What this has come to mean is that very little in the budget is available for programmes at a time when the Organization is entrusted with more and more responsibilities. I seriously think that it is time that this Council took time to reconsider the growth ceiling and see whether a more permitting interpretation and appropriate adjustment of this guidance is not possible. My view has always been that the spirit of the directive on the growth ceiling was to bring about greater financial discipline, and rational use of resources. It was not to under-fund programmes on a permanent basis.

I have spoken of the urgent need for resources to finance our operations under the Mechanism for Conflict Resolution. We need to continue with our association with and support for the democratization process in the Continent. We need to push ahead the agenda for Economic Integration. We must endeavour to resolve conflicts as we must assist our Member States in meeting the imperative of promoting and safeguarding human rights. Our environment needs protection and joint action is required to face the challenge of health, education and social development of the Continent among others. All these cannot be done with a fraction of our budget. I therefore reiterate my appeal to Council to give this matter the attention it deserves.

I thank you.