

ORGANIZATION OF  
AFRICAN UNITY

ORGANIZAÇÃO DA  
UNIDADE AFRICANA



17

ORGANISATION DE  
L'UNITE AFRICAINE

منظمة الوحدة الافريقية

---

Addis Ababa - Ethiopia - Box 3243 Tel. 51 77 00 Telex 21046 Fax (2511) 51 78 44 ✓

---

**THIRTY SECOND ORDINARY SESSION OF THE  
ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

**STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU**

YAOUNDE, CAMEROON

8 JULY 1996

Your Excellency Ato Meles Zenawi,  
Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic  
Republic of Ethiopia and Chairman of  
the 31st Ordinary Session of the Assembly  
of Heads of State and Government,  
Your Excellency, Mr. Paul Biya,  
President of the Republic of Cameroon,  
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government  
and Heads of Delegations,  
Your Excellencies, the First Ladies,  
Your Excellency, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali,  
Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are delighted to be in Yaounde, the beautiful capital of this country, the land of the hospitable and generous people of Cameroon. Since our arrival here, we have felt at home among brothers and sisters. We are pleased to be in Cameroon, a country which is known for its rich and diverse cultural heritage. We find a source of inspiration in this country which, over the years, has shown impeccable commitment to the cause of Africa and African unity and has made an important contribution to our continental Organization including providing two of its distinguished sons to serve as its Secretary General. It is, therefore, with particular pleasure that I wish to convey our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to President Paul Biya, the Government and people of

Mr. Chairman,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One year has elapsed since the last session of your Assembly. There have been significant developments in our countries and our continent continues to convey mixed signals. On the one hand, there are the agonies and frustrations our people continue to suffer as a result of severe economic hardships and the suffering and misery imposed on them by the conflicts afflicting many parts of our continent. Hundreds of thousands of our people including children and women, fearing for their lives and safety and those of their beloved ones, are being forced into exile - quite often in search of mere survival. Innocent children are being caught in the midst of adversity and are experiencing the anguish of war and human folly. Some of them have even been used as instruments for the prosecution of war and in the process robbing them of their innocence and denying them their basic right to grow up as normal children.

Conflicts in our continent continue to cause loss of lives and destruction property and infrastructure. They generate hatred among our people and undermine our efforts at nation-building and social and economic progress. At a time when other regions of the world are making gigantic progress in human development, our continent is lagging behind and the great majority of our people

On the whole, our countries and people have continued to exert enormous efforts in their quest for peace and development. These twin objectives must be pursued concurrently. For the absence of war or conflict is not enough to guarantee peace and cohesion within our societies. Peace to be durable and sustainable, must be all encompassing.

On the political front, we are witnessing encouraging developments as our countries effect changes aimed at ensuring that democracy takes root in our societies and that human rights are promoted, respected and protected. Most of our countries have embarked on policies to usher in political pluralism, good governance and the rule of law. Elections are being held to allow our people to decide on how and by whom they should be ruled. Through these elections, the people in our continent are being gradually empowered to take charge of their destiny. One significant development in the context of democratization has been the gradual but effective emergence of a dynamic, vibrant and free press in our countries. We need to continue creating an environment which allows the media to play its full role as we must also expect of them to do so in a responsible and constructive manner. These are all indeed very welcome developments which need to be consolidated as we prepare ourselves to meet the various challenges facing our continent.

backing as these efforts offer the most viable framework for a lasting peaceful solution to the conflict in Burundi.

On the larger humanitarian crisis in the Great Lakes Region, it is imperative that deliberate and sustained efforts be taken to overcome the current impasse on the repatriation of an estimated over two million refugees. This situation is pregnant with explosive developments and certainly constitutes a threat to the stability of the countries of the region - both the countries of asylum and the countries of origin.

In Somalia, we continue to be concerned that, despite all efforts, there is no visible sign of progress towards reconciliation among the various groups in that country. Yet, we have to persevere in our endeavour to assist the people of Somalia to overcome their difficulties as we should also do in the case of other conflicts and situations of tension that still prevail in other parts of our continent.

In all these situations of conflict, our Organization has strived to assist, either directly or indirectly, in advancing peace and understanding. We might not always have succeeded in achieving breakthroughs, but our countries and our Organization cannot be accused of not having tried. In some instances, however, we have been able to register encouraging results. The OAU efforts in the Comoros were particularly rewarding. The Sierra Leone Peace

understanding. It needs to be nurtured to grow and be able to maintain its role. Above all, it needs support, political and financial, from within and outside Africa to enhance its ability and capability to effectively carry out the responsibilities entrusted to it.

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the economic front, our countries have for several years now been engaged in carrying out bold reforms and adjustment programmes intended to improve the living conditions for our people. These reforms have sometimes compounded the hardships of our people, particularly the most vulnerable groups.

It was therefore with a sense of relief and encouragement that we recently received indications of positive results in the economic performance of the continent as a whole. This provides ground for optimism. It is our sincere hope that this trend will be sustained.

institutions, to redefine and build, with us, a new generation of relations based on imaginative options and genuine partnership.

For our part, we should endeavour to take up the challenge of economic integration seriously. In this respect, more attention needs to be focused on strengthening the regional economic groupings which constitute the building blocs of the African Economic Community, particularly those of them which are still weak. I am confident that our leaders will take advantage of their presence here to consult on how best to address this issue which is of vital importance if we are to make progress on the path towards the economic integration of the continent. On our part, we shall continue to work relentlessly in close cooperation with our Member States, the regional economic communities and other partners, particularly the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank in pursuit of the cause of the economic development and integration of our continent through the implementation of the Abuja Treaty.

It is self evident that apart from representing a unique forum for promoting economic integration and cooperation on the continent, the African Economic Community is the most appropriate framework within which Africa could develop and build its strength and solidarity and thus be in a better position to defend, protect and preserve its interests.

At the continental level, we need to develop confidence in ourselves and in our people. We need to release the formidable energy and resource of our people and channel them towards the renewal of our continent. We need to encourage the creative talent and ingenuity of our people.

In this respect, we must recognize the important role that women should play in effecting the desired transformation. We need to promote more audacious and ambitious policies to enable this important and dynamic segment of our society make its full contribution to the socio-economic development of our countries and assume its share of responsibilities in the policy making process. In doing so, we shall be duly recognizing the invaluable contribution and enormous sacrifices women have made and are making in the development process in our countries.

More generally, we should rely on the role of the civil society which must be enhanced. Our intellectuals, the media, the trade unions and other professional associations and organizations should be encouraged to participate in the whole process of change and renewal in our continent.

Last but not least, the youth in our continent constitute a huge reservoir of energy and resource which, with the right environment, are ready to serve as a powerful force for change and progress.



working methods to ensure that when our policy organs take decisions, they are effectively implemented. It is indeed more credible for our Organization to take a few decisions and have them implemented than to have a plethora of resolutions and decisions which will be confined to the archives.

We should design together a renewed Organization to be able to effectively assist our countries to meet the challenges that lie ahead. I submit that we should aim together at strengthening our Organization so that it could be more modern, dynamic and responsive to the needs and expectations of our continent.