



ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**MESSAGE BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
OAU SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY**

ADDIS ABABA, MAY 22, 1998

**MESSAGE BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
OAU SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE 35TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY**

Fellow Africans,

On the 25th of May, 1998, we shall be celebrating the 35th Anniversary of the founding of our Organization, the **Organization of African Unity**. In the life of an institution like ours, the 35th Anniversary is an important milestone. This is a particular stage in its history that underlines the strong will of its Member States to continue forging a common destiny through their Organization.

On this propitious occasion, therefore, it is useful to look back at the long march we have made together. While doing so, it is fitting to pay tribute to the founding fathers of our organization for their vision and wisdom in providing our continent with a viable framework for unity, solidarity, and cooperation, that has served us well over the years. We also pay tribute to the leaders and peoples of Africa who have sustained this flame of hope, determination, and commitment that has enabled our continent and its peoples to travel this long journey together. It therefore, gives me pleasure to extend to my fellow Africans the expression of warm felicitations and best wishes for this occasion.

An event of this nature allows us to collectively reflect upon our experience, and to re-dedicate ourselves to the vigorous pursuit of our objectives. At this milestone, we also need to be cognizant of our shortfalls and the challenges that lie ahead, especially within the context of the many changes taking place within our countries and at the global level.

Among the major preoccupations within our collective agenda in the past year has been the pursuit of peace, security and stability in the region. For, we believe that no serious socio-economic development can be achieved in our countries in the absence of peace. It is gratifying to note that, in the past year, we have achieved remarkable success in reducing the areas that are afflicted by the scourge of conflict. At last, peace has come to Liberia, after years of unremitting blood-shed and destruction. Similarly, the end of conflict in the then Zaire and now

the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and also in the Central African Republic gives cause for hope and optimism.

The earnest efforts of the Government and People of Rwanda – a country emerging from conflict and the trauma of genocide, to forge ahead in the process of re-building the structures and institutions for national development are also a source of encouragement. It is therefore, a matter of deep concern that at the time when these efforts, aimed at consolidating peace and engaging in reconstruction, are being pursued, massacres of innocent people, including women and children in some parts of the country continue to be perpetrated.

There is also the significant and historic achievement of the restoration of Constitutional order in Sierra Leone. We pay tribute to ECOMOG and ECOWAS for their efforts and sacrifices in working on behalf of Africa in the restoration of peace and stability in Sierra Leone. We also commend the people of Sierra Leone for the uncompromising stand they took against the Junta. The OAU is proud at this achievement as it is proud for having taken and consistently maintained a principled position of opposition to the illegal military Junta and for its active support for the reinstatement of the duly elected President of the country.

On the economic front, we have also made remarkable strides in our quest for economic integration. On 3rd June 1997, during the 33rd OAU Summit held in Harare, Zimbabwe, our leaders convened, for the first time, as the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Economic Community. This occasion marked a concrete realization of the 1991 Abuja Treaty that laid out a blue-print for the establishment of the African Economic Community. Moreover, the last Session of Council of Ministers, which was held in Addis Ababa in February, witnessed the signing of the Protocol between the African Economic Community and the Regional Economic Communities. This opened the way for enhanced cooperation between the Community and the Regional groupings of ECOWAS, SADC, COMESA, and IGAD, in a dynamic partnership. As a result of this move we now have in place an effective framework for coordinating and harmonizing the various programmes and activities of the Regional Economic Communities.

These achievements in forging peace, and in promoting economic integration in the Region, have been made possible by the efforts and determination of our governments, and also by the resilience and sacrifices of our people. However, there are other areas where we have not been able to achieve our goals and objectives.

In Burundi, our effort towards promoting lasting peace and stability have yet to produce the desired results. There are, however, encouraging signs. The internal dialogue being pursued within Burundi and the recent consultations undertaken in Dar-es-Salaam by Mwalimu Nyerere, the Facilitator of the Burundi peace process with President Buyoya and other leaders of the Principal Parties to the conflict give reason for optimism.

It is my fervent hope that Burundi Leaders will seize the opportunity of the envisaged All-Party Burundi Talks scheduled to be held in Arusha next month to give peace a chance.

In Somalia, the situation is still precarious and disturbing. It is thus, vital to intensify efforts at ending the conflict and achieving national reconciliation, so that a new chapter of hope, peace and progress can be opened for the people of that country. In the Sudan, we support the on-going efforts deployed by the IGAD countries in promoting a lasting solution to a conflict that has brought misery and agony to the Sudanese people for a very long time. While these efforts continue, we appeal to all the parties to the conflict to facilitate an uninterrupted flow of humanitarian assistance to the tens of thousands of people who are threatened by famine and whose helpless condition is a matter of deep concern and anguish for us all.

In Western Sahara, we look forward to an early implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through the holding of a free and fair referendum. The OAU has continued to cooperate with the United Nations towards the achievement of this objective.

The on-going crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea is a matter of grave concern to us. It constitutes a setback to the commendable efforts made by the Leaders of

the two countries, and to the other Leaders in the Region, to bring about peace, security, stability and development. It is my earnest hope that wisdom will prevail and that both parties will do their utmost to avoid an escalation of the crisis and to seek a peaceful solution to it. Only a peaceful resolution of the dispute based on dialogue and negotiation can be a real solution. The alternative of escalation can only spell disaster for the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea as well as for the region as a whole. Africa, which has been strengthened by the stability and understanding and cooperation between these two sister States can only be seriously undermined if the crisis is allowed to escalate. It is, therefore, in our collective interest to spare no effort to find a peaceful solution to this unfortunate dispute.

Fellow Africans,

As we observe the 35th Anniversary of the OAU, we should also reflect on the meaning and significance of this particular day. This day was set aside to symbolize the destiny of the continent and its people, and their determination to transcend their differences, in the form of ethnicity, religion, race, or gender, and exalt their belonging to the single continent of Africa. While the occasion may be only a symbol, or even a celebration; but it more profoundly underlines a commitment, a dedication, a mobilizing inspiration for achieving an integrated Africa. Indeed, with almost a prophetic foresight, our founding fathers were preempting the divisions within and between societies, and promoting cohesion and unity among us.

On this occasion, it is also useful to reflect on the glaring gap between the laudable declarations, resolutions and policies adopted by our Continental organizations and national governments at various levels, and the actual implementation. Put succinctly, we have not been short of strategies and prescriptions to our problems. In fact, the record bears testimony to the contrary. Our main problem has been our inability to fully translate into action our decisions.

On this auspicious day, let us resolve to translate our declarations and blue-prints into concrete programmes and activities. The only way we can overcome the hurdles that forestall implementation, is by garnering the will to

action, starting with the small steps, harnessing opportunities, and deploying all the forces available. There is no doubt that the situation we face today is very challenging. However, we are also confident that if we apply ourselves seriously and raise our determination, we will be able to transform the continent and overcome the difficulties that we encounter in improving the conditions of our people.

Similarly, the accelerated development of the continent as well as its peace and security depends on collaborative effort between our Governments and Peoples in a partnership that is solid and durable. Africa will certainly have more chance in addressing its problems when our people work together in unity, in strength, and in solidarity. It is in this regard that I believe that the building of the African Economic Community requires the contribution of all. It is an undertaking that has to be taken by the involvement and initiatives of actors at all levels - from national, regional, to continental levels. Indeed, the Community has to evolve from the people themselves, who should be fully involved at all stages of its development.

In the same regard, the establishment of lasting peace in our continent needs the participation and commitment of all. There is a role for our Member States, there is a role for the General Secretariat and the Mechanism for Conflict Management, and there is also a role for individual Africans – men and women - and their institutions, as well as for the Civil Society at large. Peace is so precious that it has to be a main concern for all of us. We all have to do what we can to support the effort of our continental and regional organizations to ensure that we have lasting peace in our continent.

Fellow Africans,

On this occasion of the observance of the 35th Anniversary of the OAU, let us all resolve, Governments and People, to rededicate ourselves to the elimination of poverty, misery and blood-shed from the continent; let us once more commit ourselves to forge closer links between our States and Peoples; let us resolve to fight injustice in its forms and manifestations, whether in the field of human rights violations or the continued impoverishment of our peoples; and let us, in an unrelenting collective effort, build an African Home for the Africans. Let us commit ourselves to the principles which have sustained our

organization. Let us mark this day by re-dedicating ourselves to unity, solidarity, peace, harmony and the integrity of all our peoples.

I thank you.

Addis Ababa, May 22, 1998