

ORGANIZATION OF
AFRICAN UNITY
ORGANIZAÇÃO DA
UNIDADE AFRICANA



12
ORGANISATION DE
L'UNITE AFRICAINE
ظمة الوحدة الافريقية

Addis Ababa - Ethiopia - Box 1141 Tel. 51 77 00 Telex 20046 Fax (251-1) 51 31 35

Assembly of Heads of State and
Government
Thirty-fifth Ordinary Session
12 – 14 July 1999
Algiers, Algeria

Statement of H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General of OAU

- Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellency Abdel Aziz Bouteflika,
President of the People's Democratic
Republic of Algeria.
- Your Excellencies Heads of State and
Government and Heads of Delegation,
- Your Excellency, Kofi Annan,
Secretary General of the United Nations,
- Distinguished Guests.
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are happy to be in this beautiful city of Algiers which thirty-one years ago, hosted the 5th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. We are pleased to be in this country which is so close to our hearts and to be among the Algerian people whose role and contribution to the advancement of the African cause has been most inspiring. I wish, on this auspicious occasion to pay a well deserved tribute to the heroic people of Algeria and their leadership, for their commitment and dedication to our Continent and also for the sacrifices they have made

in pursuit of the African struggle for emancipation and progress.

Since its independence, whose anniversary was celebrated just a few days ago, Algeria has devoted its full energies and resources to the promotion of the well-being and progress of its people. It has, at the same time, demonstrated exemplary solidarity with the other peoples of Africa in the true spirit of Pan-Africanism. It has been at the forefront of the struggles of the developing countries for freedom and human dignity and progress. While acknowledging this invaluable contribution and role of Algeria, it is also fitting that we express our profound solidarity with the Algerian people as they are emerging from a period of trial and difficulties and are addressing the challenges of national development in peace and harmony and promoting national reconciliation. The presence here at this Summit of such an overwhelming number of Heads of State and Government is an eloquent testimony to this solidarity and a clear demonstration of the confidence that Africa and its leaders have in this country.

This meeting is the last Summit of our Organization before the new millennium. It provides therefore an opportunity for us, as Africans, to reflect on our past, to examine our present and to look forward to our common future. It is also an occasion to remember and pay homage to the founding fathers of our Organization for their wisdom and vision, and for having provided our Continent with an Institution which embodies the collective will and aspirations of the peoples of Africa.

I wish, in this respect, to join President Abdel Aziz Bouteflika in recognizing and saluting two founding fathers who are in our midst today, the former President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, His Excellency Ahmed Ben Bella and the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. Their presence amongst us in this hall is a source of inspiration and encouragement to us all who are entrusted with the responsibility of pursuing the lofty goals and visions which they, together with their peers, set for our Continental Organization and our peoples thirty-six years ago.

As we look back to our history, we should acknowledge with satisfaction the long march the African peoples have traveled together in the search for freedom, human dignity and progress. These achievements are self-evident. The twin evil of colonialism and apartheid in our Continent has been relegated to the dustbin of history. It is important not to under-estimate these achievements or to minimize the efforts and sacrifices that made them possible. Many of us, while always confident that the forces of freedom would ultimately triumph in the then apartheid South Africa, nevertheless were unsure that that triumph would be realized during our life time. Yet, now we not only have a democratic and non-racial South Africa, but the country of the great Madiba Nelson Mandela has just seen the election and assumption of office of a second democratically elected President in the person of Mr. Thabo Mbeki, whose presence here we warmly welcome.

The struggle for African liberation was never easy. It required the resilience and sacrifice of Africans. It also required maintaining and sustaining the cohesion and solidarity of our peoples. In reminiscing about Africa's epic struggle, it is appropriate to recall here the historic

contribution of our host, President Abdel Aziz Bouteflika who, as the President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1974, gave a ruling, which effectively excluded the delegation of South Africa from participating in the UN General Assembly. I was privileged to witness that momentous occasion and appreciated the courage and foresight with which the President assumed his responsibility. The significance of that ruling on the struggle against apartheid was everlasting. Yet, that decision was only possible because Africa was united and was able to marshal the support of all her friends.

One important lesson we can derive from that period of our history is that whenever we acted together and with determination, we prevailed, which is why over the years, our Organization in spite of what its detractors say, has proved to be a unique instrument for the unity and solidarity of Africans and for the fulfillment of their aspirations and objectives.

After surmounting the hurdles of achieving independence and sovereignty and asserting themselves within the international community as partners for human

progress, our countries were confronted with the socio-economic realities that prevailed in the 1980s and that were compounded by the global changes which emerged in the early 1990s. As a result of these factors, the unity, cohesion and solidarity of the African peoples have been seriously undermined.

The fragility of our nations and communities made them more vulnerable to tensions and social upheavals. Internal conflicts have emerged as a new phenomenon in the Continent with their devastating consequences in terms of loss of life and suffering caused to our people, particularly women and children, as well as the destruction of infrastructure. In a way, rather than build and consolidate, many of our societies have seen their social fabric torn apart by conflict and instability.

Conflicts have also diverted the meagre resources of our countries from the fight against poverty and diseases in the Continent and undermined our ability to address the basic needs of the people. These conflicts and the resulting climate of insecurity have deprived our Continent from investment opportunities, both local and foreign at a time

when our people are in dire need for these investments. Thus, while other regions of the developing world were achieving remarkable progress, our Continent was experiencing socio-economic stagnation and, in some cases, retrogression.

Poor governance, inappropriate policies, corruption and more often than not, a hostile international environment have combined to produce a sad irony in our Continent, for while ours is one of the richest continents in the world, our people continue to live in the most difficult conditions of poverty.

As we therefore prepare ourselves to enter a new millennium, we must in words and deeds endeavour to erase the image of a Continent in permanent crisis; a Continent where human rights are violated with impunity; where corruption is rampant and where democracy is in constant peril. In a nutshell, we need to get our act together. Over the years, Africa has taken significant actions in that direction and appropriate frameworks have been developed to achieve that objective.

In 1980, when the overall socio-economic situation was alarming, African leaders adopted the Lagos Plan of Action as a strategic blue print of action for the promotion of socio-economic recovery, development and cooperation in the Continent. In 1982, African leaders adopted the African Charter on Human and People's Rights thus opening a new chapter in the history of the Continent when the basic rights of the people should be respected and protected.

In 1990, your Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Africa's response. In that Declaration, African leaders committed themselves to assume their responsibilities for the destiny of the Continent and its peoples. They undertook to address the scourge of conflicts with renewed vigour and determination. They also undertook to pursue the democratization process and promote the respect of fundamental human rights on the Continent. They committed themselves to put in place the necessary economic reforms that would lead to the reinvigoration of their economies towards socio-economic progress and well-being.

It was in that spirit that in 1991, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, as the basis for the economic advancement and integration of the Continent. These efforts aimed at adjusting the Continent to the new realities that were unfolding both within and outside Africa, also led to the establishment in Cairo, in 1993, by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, of an OAU Mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

The frameworks that we have established are all encompassing and are quite capable of addressing the different areas of our concern. What is crucial however is to ensure that our declarations and commitments are put into operation. Regrettably, however, this has not always been the case. For instance, in Harare in 1997, African leaders made it clear that unconstitutional changes of Government were to be a thing of the past. Yet, the phenomenon of coups d'etat still haunts our Continent. This problem needs to be addressed with a view to assuring that democracy and the rule of law is nurtured and consolidated in Africa.

We all recognize that given the challenges of globalization and international competition, Africa's strength both internally and in its relations with the rest of the world lies in pursuing vigorously the goal of economic cooperation and integration. Yet the march towards the establishment of the African Economic Community has been unacceptably slow.

The challenge of putting our declared commitment into practical action must be taken seriously if Africa is to enter the new millennium better equipped. This is particularly important when consideration is given to the fact that there has been a diminished international interest in support for and solidarity with our causes or at the very least there is a disproportionate treatment in dealing with the plight of our people with those in similar situations. Need I recall the reaction of the international community in respect of the justifiable cause of the Kosovo refugees to that manifested to no less compelling causes of the refugees and the displaced people of Sierra Leone, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region to mention but a few examples.

My plea to African leaders is that we should draw the necessary lessons from all these experiences and chart the way forward. Two points need be made. First, it is clear that with determination and perseverance, it is possible to accomplish a lot. Crises and conflicts which may be considered intractable can be effectively addressed if there is unity of purpose.

The cease-fire agreement signed two days ago in Lusaka and the Peace Agreement that was signed in Lome on the 7th of July 1999, are a testimony to the fact that whenever there is a determination to solve a problem and when the parties demonstrate good will and a sense of compromise and accommodation, it is possible to achieve success. These peace agreements are a great achievement for our Continent.

I wish to seize this solemn occasion to reiterate my profound appreciation to the leaders and to all the parties that contributed to this peace endeavour. I wish in particular to express my appreciation to President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia and other leaders from within and outside the region for their commitment to peace and for

their sustained efforts in order to seek a lasting solution to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, thus paving the way for the establishment of a climate of peace, security, stability and development in the Great Lakes Region. I wish also to place on record my sincere appreciation to President Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo and the other leaders of the ECOWAS countries for their sustained and successful efforts aimed at putting an end to the conflict in Sierra Leone. The role of the United Nations in both processes has been and will continue to be significant. I would also like to express my appreciation to our brother Kofi Annan for his personal support.

These achievements have been possible through concerted and collective efforts. They should encourage us to work even harder in order to address the other hotbeds of tension which are still prevailing on the Continent such as the conflicts in Sudan, Somalia, Burundi and Angola. We need to especially intensify our efforts at ending the tragic conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In this respect, I wish to pay tribute to the members of the OAU high-level delegation on the Dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea for the efforts made in the search for a peaceful solution to the

conflict between these two countries. Indeed, it is a matter of record that the high-level delegation under the Chairmanship of President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, the out-going Chairman of the OAU, has made serious efforts and offered the two parties a framework agreement which has been widely welcomed and acclaimed as being fair and balanced and as paving a way out of the current unfortunate conflict.

As we are about to enter into the new millenium our Continent cannot afford to remain one of perpetual insecurity and instability. We should recommit ourselves as leaders and people to do everything possible to free the Continent from the vicious cycle of poverty, diseases, conflicts and violence. Our Continent is endowed with the necessary natural and human resources that can enable it to make meaningful progress towards socio-economic development. Our people cannot remain marginalized at a time when other regions of the world, with less resources, are moving steadfastly ahead and are preparing themselves to meet the challenges of globalization.

Meeting here in the capital of Algeria, the country of a million martyrs, who made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of Algeria's liberation – it is fitting that we evoke their memory and the memory of all those who fought and gave their lives for our continent's liberation and rededicate ourselves to forge ahead towards a better tomorrow for our continent and our people. We should resolve to make the 21st century, Africa's century. Our founding fathers laid a solid foundation for a united and coordinated action for the attainment of freedom and dignity of our people. The challenge before our current leaders is not only to consolidate that freedom, dignity, unity and cohesion of our people but above all to ensure that Africa enters the new millenium stronger, better prepared and determined to claim its legitimate place on the global scene. The proposal just made by the Head of State of Nigeria, General Obasanjo to declare next year (the year 2000) as the Year of Peace and Security in Africa merits our full support.