



Organization of African Unity

**ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
THIRTY-FIRST ORDINARY SESSION**

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

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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**Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies, the Heads of State and
Government,
Honorable Ministers, Ambassadors,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Permit me to begin by joining our illustrious host, His Excellency, Ato Meles Zenawi, President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in welcoming you all to Addis Ababa and to wish your Assembly fruitful deliberations. Allow me also to pay deserving tribute to the outgoing Chairman, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, who so ably presided over the affairs of the Assembly in the course of the last year. His clairvoyance and sagacity proved so critical in articulating and projecting the African view to the world at the most critical times in the last year. I very much valued his unfailing co-operation and ready counsel. I wish to put on record my profound appreciation and admiration for the dignity and commitment with which President Ben Ali defended Africa's causes and provided dynamic leadership for our Organization.

Your Excellencies,

Your Assembly is convening against the background of major developments in Africa and the world as a whole. In Africa, some of our countries are still entangled in conflicts one of which led to the horrendous massacres and genocide in Rwanda. Even now as Rwanda is struggling to regain its feet, the presence of hundreds of thousands of Rwandese refugees in the neighbouring countries and particularly of armed groups from the

former Rwandese Army and the Intarahamwe constitutes a challenge to peace, security and stability not only of Rwanda but of the entire region. I wish to reiterate my appeal to African States and to the international community to render added assistance to the Government of Rwanda in the strengthening of its institutions of Government particularly in the legal field so as to speed up the process of justice which is so crucial to national reconciliation and reconstruction. In particular, I urge the speedy operationalization of the International Tribunal so as to bring those who perpetrated genocide and massacres to justice, and to permit the commencement of the process of national healing which that country so badly needs.

I wish also to encourage the Rwandese Government to pursue its efforts aimed at facilitating the return of refugees in co-operation with the neighbouring countries and the international community and at promoting national reconciliation.

The situation in Burundi continues to be a source of serious concern. Indeed, recent developments there do not augur well for the future of that country. It is a matter of deep regret that the forces of extremism seem to have succeeded in undermining the efforts of the Coalition Government and those of the forces of moderation. I am gravely concerned over the deteriorating situation in Burundi and the possibility of a further degeneration and polarization with attendant consequences of further killings and loss of innocent lives.

In Somalia, we welcomed the fact that the situation did not evolve into a generalized conflict which was feared by the international community. Yet, the security situation remains uncertain and the Somali leaders are still divided on ways and means to bring about peace and national reconciliation in that country.

In Liberia, it is our fervent hope that the most recent efforts especially those of the Current Chairman of ECOWAS, H.E. President J.J. Rawlings of Ghana will produce positive results and that solution will be found to the remaining problems obstructing the implementation of the Peace Accords. In this connection, we welcome the meeting which the Head of State of Nigeria, H.E. General Sani Abacha had with the Leader of the NPFL, Mr. Charles Taylor which I believe would impact favourably on the Liberian peace process. It is also our hope that the positive evolution of the situation in Liberia will create more propitious circumstances for an end to the conflict in Sierra Leone - a conflict which has brought considerable suffering to the people of that country.

Your Excellencies,

Africa is involved and determined to persevere in helping the people of these countries lay down the swords of war and join together in search of peace. But while Africa and the world can help, we cannot substitute for the central role of those at conflict. Neither can the world impose peace on them. The onus rests primarily on the people of these

countries and their leadership to give peace a chance. I speak in these terms because we have seen what difference it made in Mozambique and now in Angola when leaders are determined to pursue the avenue of peace.

Mr. Chairman,

When this Assembly adopted the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, it did so against the background of the proliferation and intensification of conflicts in the Continent. Through the Mechanism, the Assembly sought to give Africa a means and an instrument to liberate itself from the oppression and destruction of conflicts. It was also an emphatic political message that Africa was now prepared to struggle to find peace in the Continent and to provide the leadership in that process.

Today, two years later, the results of that decision are quite clear. Through the instrumentality of the institutions of the Mechanism, Africa has re-seized the initiative and taken the mantle of leadership in the efforts at peace.

Mr. Chairman,

In the course of the operationalization of the Mechanism, we have come face to face with some unforeseen difficulties associated with the inherent limitations of the Mechanism. This was not unexpected as Member

States would not have anticipated all situations and provided for them in the Mechanism, and thus therefore the need to adjust on a continuing basis.

Our inability to bring greater, timely and meaningful assistance to the United Nations in the field of peace-keeping, our lack of an institutional structure within the Organization which can co-ordinate Africa's response to peace observation or peace-keeping needs, as well as the fact that we are actually involved in some form of peace-keeping even if marginally, have strengthened me in my view that we need to build an African capacity in the field. I have had opportunity in the past to speak of the setting up of ready contingents within the armies of our countries, which we could keep on call and make readily available to the United Nations and exceptionally, to the OAU when circumstances warrant and demand. I believe that this is one of the concrete ways of enhancing Africa's capacity in peace-keeping. It is by no means the only one.

This is not to suggest that we should depart from the emphasis placed on preventive diplomacy and peace observation in the Cairo Declaration adopting the Mechanism.

On the contrary, I believe strongly that consistent with the Cairo Declaration, preventive action should continue to be the central element of the Mechanism and that peace-keeping remain the primary responsibility of the United Nations. At the same time however, I also see strong merit in making the necessary adjustment and contingency arrangements so that in circumstances of unforeseen developments, Africa is not caught unprepared

and helpless. Such contingency arrangements are simply an insurance against rapid and unanticipated developments, and which would enable us to bring practical support to the United Nations in its peace-keeping operations in Africa and even beyond. I equally see strong need to develop the capacity within the OAU to effectively manage any deployment which is undertaken in peace observation Missions and in exceptional circumstances, in those of peace-keeping.

Mr. Chairman,

Along with the enhancement of this indigenous capacity, Africa should be looking at the fundamental question of the resources to finance operations under the Mechanism. We have the Peace Fund to which Africa's financial contributions are still minimal. Instead, we have had in comparison, substantial assistance from a number of countries from outside the Continent. While international solidarity is critical in the mobilization of resources, Africa also needs to demonstrate, in concrete terms, that it is willing to commit resources. After all charity begins at home. Unless Africa is prepared to commit resources, even those who support us will be discouraged by shouldering the bulk of the financial burden of Africa's Peace Agenda. I therefore hope that ways and means of encouraging African countries to respond more positively in creating an adequate, independent and self-sustaining resource base for the Mechanism.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the adoption of the Mechanism we have received very enthusiastic support from outside the Continent, in terms of political, financial and material support. I want to reiterate my gratitude to all those countries and institutions which have supported us and provided resources to finance and sustain the operational activities of the Mechanism.

In addition to the financial and material support, we have had ideas advanced and concrete initiatives undertaken by some of those of our supporters from outside the Continent. These initiatives, in their sweep and content, do invariably cover the same ground as the Mechanism. This is to be expected as the purpose of the initiative is to complement the Mechanism and to help enhance its effectiveness. Indeed, our countries and the Secretariat have understood this to be the case, and have associated themselves with these initiatives either by endorsing them or taking part in their elaboration and development.

I now believe that we need to look at these initiatives closely and situate them within the context of the Mechanism. We need to reflect on them and together think on how they all could be brought into greater focus and how they could be made to complement and support the Mechanism. This reflection is necessary as I see real possibilities of proliferating initiatives, duplicating efforts and dispersing resources, including in the worst of circumstances that of working at cross purposes.

Africa needs clarity on these issues so as to ensure that we all speak the same language and mean the same thing when we support or get involved in these initiatives. I am sure our supporters also need clarity so that they can be more helpful.

Mr. Chairman,

Of late, I have noted an increasing resurgence of interstate tensions around the Continent which, if not contained, threaten to undermine that unity of action and continental solidarity which we seek to draw upon to foster peace and development in the Continent. This is why I believe that this Assembly needs to take time to look at how the spirit of African brotherhood can be rekindled and how these tensions which underlie simmering conflicts can be lowered. Africa cannot afford to be distracted from the focus of bringing peace and promoting socio-economic development.

Mr. Chairman,

In the course of the last decade, Africa has been grappling with economic reform through structural adjustment programs. It has not been easy to governments or to the people. To both, this has been a very difficult period involving difficult choices and great risks. But governments persist in the reforms in the firm belief that they are necessary and good in the long run. In most cases, the people have endured the pain and suffering which these economic reforms have precipitated. Beyond this endurance

however, I see great tensions building which need to be addressed if the integrity of the economic reforms is to be sustained long enough to produce effective results, and if social order is to be safeguarded.

As we strive to bring reform internally, we need also to see how we can strengthen the institutions which will steer our countries collectively, out of the cycle of poverty and under-development. In Abuja, four years ago, Africa took the historic first step towards continental integration by adopting the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. It was a collective statement to the world and an engagement Africa undertook to work towards continental economic unity. It was also a statement that Africa was now determined to emerge from the traditional policies which held it in perpetual dependence and through collective self-reliance to put in place the continental structures which would bring about sustainable development. It was a bold statement and it remains one.

It is now a year since the Treaty came into force. Yet the agenda of economic integration has been moving at a very slow pace. I am concerned that even the process of further ratifications seems to have slowed down and work on the various protocols to the Treaty is painfully slow. I am equally concerned that the Regional Economic Groupings, the building blocs for the African Economic Community are also experiencing difficulties which are effectively stifling progress and undermining the cause of regional

integration. In addition, we see a new phenomenon of emerging new regional and sub-regional economic and monetary groupings whose purpose of creation bear directly to the agenda of integration.

The slackening of the pace of work within the context of the African Economic Community, the difficulties being experienced within and among the Regional Economic Groupings and the establishing of parallel institutions, are all disturbing signals that Africa is losing the zeal of continental integration. And unless we take action to rededicate ourselves to the objective of integration and commit our countries inextricably to it, we run the risk of doing harm to the ideals of the Abuja Treaty. I therefore hope that the Assembly will devote attention to seeing how we can breath in new life into the agenda of integration and how continental unity and solidarity can be marshalled to reactivate action in this critical area.

Mr. Chairman,

The Assembly will be considering the Council report on the financial situation of the Organization. As I had opportunity to state before the Council, I have been encouraged by the efforts of most countries to settle their arrears of assessed financial contributions to the budget of the Organization either in part or in full. This is heartening as it represents renewed commitment of Member States to the Organization. It is heartening also because it restores balance and spreads out the load of financing the Organization within its general membership. I want to express the hope that this is only the beginning and that even those countries which are still in

arrears, will strive to bring their contributions up to date. Once again, I wish to express my gratitude to the Member States for this renewed disposition to meet their financial obligations to the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa has formidable challenges before it which require to be met. They range from natural to man-made disasters. They include the triple challenge of conflict resolution, democratization and socio-economic development. We cannot effectively confront all these challenges unless we are resolute in our determination and vigorous in our actions. As the circumstances change, so too do we need to adjust our strategies and tactics. The present problems we face are complex, requiring multi-dimensional approaches. We should therefore bring imagination and innovation to the way we deal with the issues before the Continent. A key component of this innovative and imaginative approach must be the will to take on the difficult tasks rather than to skirt them for the sake of the political expediency of the soft options. We must have that sense of daring to face the issues squarely.

Africa has charted its course into the future. We have adopted a Mechanism for conflict resolution as an instrument of peace on the Continent. We have the Abuja Treaty as a means to economic deliverance. We all subscribe to the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights as our guide to the establishment of societies built on the regard to the fundamental human freedoms and the worth of the human being. Our countries are all committed to the agenda of democratization. This is illustrative of the

clarity of perspective, objective we seek and of the direction the Continent has decided to take. Africa knows what it wants to achieve and where it wants to go. All we need now is the determination of the leadership to guide the Continent along this path. This is the challenge which this Assembly and Africa at large faces. We have the ability to triumph. We now need the will and determination to succeed.

I thank you.

