



Organization of African Unity

**Statement by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim  
Secretary General of the OAU  
at the Twentieth Ordinary Session of  
the Authority of Heads of State and  
Government of ECOWAS**

Abuja, Nigeria

28 - 29 August, 1997

- **Your Excellency,  
Gen. Sani Abacha, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief  
of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of  
Nigeria and Current Chairman of ECOWAS,**
- **Your Excellencies,**
- **Heads of State and Government,**
- **Distinguished Ministers,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish, at the outset, to express my appreciation to His Excellency General Sani Abacha, the Current Chairman of ECOWAS, for the kind invitation extended to me to attend this Session of the ECOWAS Summit. I am delighted to be back in Abuja and to be part of this august gathering which has before it an Agenda of fostering peace, stability and economic development of the West African Sub-Region.

Your Summit this year takes place under very special circumstances. The presence amongst you today of President Charles Taylor of Liberia is a clear manifestation of what can be achieved when there is unity of purpose and determination to work

together towards realization of peace, security and stability in the Region and on the Continent.

The victory which has been scored in Liberia is not only a victory for the Liberian people, but a victory for the people of the West African Sub-Region and indeed a victory for all African people. I wish to pay tribute to President Charles Taylor for the efforts he is deploying towards national reconciliation and consolidation of peace in his country as well as his declared commitment to the respect for human rights. I wish also to congratulate the leaders of the Sub-Region for the efforts which the countries of the region have made to bring peace and stability to the people of Liberia. It is gratifying that the enormous sacrifices made by these countries and especially those who have contributed troops to ECOMOG have not been in vain.

It is also fitting here for me, on behalf of our entire Continent, to pay a glowing tribute to all the personnel of ECOMOG for their crucial contribution in Liberia which has made today's realities in that country possible. We honour the memory of those among them who have sacrificed their lives in the service of Liberia and Africa. To the Government and people of Nigeria - our host - I wish to register our gratitude for their important, indeed, crucial

contribution. I wish in particular to register and commend the dedication and vital contribution of the Head of State of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha as Chairman of ECOWAS, to the resolution of the liberation crisis. I wish also to recall with appreciation the important role played by the preceding Chairmen of ECOWAS, who provided leadership in the search for a solution to the conflict in Liberia.

It is a well known fact that Liberia and its people have been traumatized by the seven years of conflict. Today, most of the infrastructure in that country have been destroyed. Much of the Liberian population have either been internally displaced or are still living as refugees in neighbouring countries. As experiences in other parts of this Continent have shown, elections on their own do not necessarily bring about stability and socio-economic development, especially, in situations where the level of polarization of the society had been extensive. In order therefore, to consolidate the gains of the democratic process particularly, in the post conflict period, there is a very strong need to engage in activities that will support the three principles of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation of Liberia and its people. We need to pursue these objectives with the same vigour and cohesion as we did with respect to our pursuit for the peace process in that

country. Above all, the Government and people of Liberia need assistance. It is incumbent upon Africa and the international community at large, including the international institutions, to rise up to this challenge.

**Mr. Chairman,**  
**Excellencies,**

The celebration of our collective victory in Liberia, has been dampened by the unfortunate developments in the Republic of Sierra Leone, where on the day we were celebrating Africa Day, elements of the military in that country decided to overthrow the democratically elected Government of President Tejan Kabbah, thus reversing the outcome of the democratic choice of the people of Sierra Leone. In spite of the collective demand of the leaders of Africa in Harare, Zimbabwe, during the thirty-third Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the military junta continues to maintain its stranglehold on power in Sierra Leone. In effect, they have continued to defy the aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone and the collective will of the entire International Community.



The situation in Sierra Leone is of very serious concern to the OAU and certainly to you all. It flies in the face of everything we have been trying to do to consolidate the democratization process in the Continent. Indeed, the action of the military elements in Sierra Leone constitutes a major setback to our collective efforts in support of the process of empowering our people to determine who should lead them and for what period. The challenge therefore before us today, is to maintain our cohesion in the pursuit of our common objective which in this particular case, is the restoration of Constitutional legality and the return of President Tejan Kabbah to Sierra Leone as the country's democratically elected President.

We must also persevere in our efforts to assist the people of that country to work towards national reconciliation within the framework of the Abidjan Agreement which still remains the most viable option for the restoration of lasting peace in Sierra Leone. I wish to seize this opportunity to appeal to the military junta in Sierra Leone to place national interest above selfish and other interests and to cooperate fully with the ECOWAS Committee of Four. On our part, we at the OAU will continue to strongly support the efforts of the countries of the Region aimed at bringing

peace, security and stability to Sierra Leone. These efforts are very much in keeping with the appeal made by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU in their Session in Harare.

**Mr Chairman,**

**Excellencies,**

This current Session of ECOWAS is also taking place against the backdrop of the first Summit of the African Economic Community, which was held in Harare, Zimbabwe in June 1997. I wish to express our appreciation to ECOWAS for the extensive briefing of the Summit on the progress which has been made in the Region in the area of economic development and integration.

Over the years, we have worked closely with ECOWAS for the realization of the African Economic Community. We need to collaborate more actively and in a more efficient manner to build capacity especially within the Regional Economic Groupings for meeting the challenges of the long-term economic development of our Continent. Naturally, and as provided for by the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, Sub-Regional

groupings like ECOWAS constitute the foundation of our future Community. Indeed, what clearly emerged in Harare, was the need to work assiduously towards the institutionalization of the relationship between the African Economic Community and sub regional groupings like ECOWAS.

During its first Session, the Assembly of the African Economic Community approved the Protocol on relations between the Community and the Regional Economic Groupings and authorized me to sign the Protocol on behalf of the AEC. I wish to appeal to this Summit of ECOWAS to do likewise, namely, to authorize the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS to sign the Protocol on your behalf. I am happy to note that this Session of your Summit will address the critical problems of integration and other related issues which have been incorporated into the work programme of ECOSOC. It is my fervent hope that ECOWAS which has been in the forefront of economic integration and development will adopt during this its current Session practical measures that will bring about the consolidation of the achievements of your Community over the years.



**Mr. Chairman,**

The challenges before the ECOWAS Sub-Region like the challenges facing the Continent as a whole are enormous. But, with unity, cohesion and determination on our part, we can certainly overcome many of these challenges. Let the firm example shown by ECOWAS and ECOMOG in Liberia serve not only as an inspiration, but, also as a living testimony and reminder of what our countries are capable of doing and achieving, notwithstanding the difficult economic and social circumstances that face each and every member of our collective African family.

I wish you successful deliberations.