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Organization of African Unity

**ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT  
TWENTY-NINTH ORDINARY SESSION**

**Statement of the Secretary General  
H.E. Salim Ahmed Salim**

Cairo, Egypt

June 28, 1993

**Mr. Chairman,**  
**Distinguished Heads of State and**  
**Government and Heads of Delegation,**  
**Excellencies,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like, at the very outset, to join President Hosni Moubarak in bidding you all a hearty welcome to Cairo and to wish your Assembly, fruitful deliberations. Permit me also to put on record, my profound gratitude to the outgoing Chairman, President Abdou Diouf of Senegal for the outstanding manner in which he presided over as Chairman of the OAU in the course of the past year. I am particularly grateful for the unfailing support and cooperation and constant counsel which he extended to me and my colleagues in the General Secretariat. The many and varied, efforts he expended, the dynamic leadership he provided particularly in the search for solution to the conflicts which continue to plague our continent stand in eloquent testimony of his personal commitment and that of his country - Senegal to the cause of freedom, peace and justice in Africa. Once again I wish to thank him most profoundly for his cooperation, support and counsel.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The torch of leadership could not have been passed on to abler hands than those of our distinguished host, President Moubarak of Egypt. President Moubarak and the country he leads, have been an example of dedication and commitment to the cause of freedom and justice in Africa and beyond. Three years ago I had the honour and privilege of working closely with President Moubarak when he previously held the

chairmanship of the OAU. I know I can rest secure in the confident knowledge that we in the General Secretariat can rely on his full support and counsel.

Allow me also to welcome the presence of President Issaias Afewerki of the new State of Eritrea in the Assembly.

**Your Excellencies,**

Allow me, at this juncture, to place on record my deep gratitude to all Your Excellencies for the tremendous support and encouragement you have given me over the last nearly four years. Your constant counsel, your graciousness with ideas and your understanding, have given me inspiration and re-enforced my courage. I am humbled by the reaffirmation of your confidence in my person by re-electing me to continue with the task of directing the affairs of the General Secretariat. I take this confidence, not only as your agreement with what I and my colleagues in the General Secretariat are trying to do but equally as an expression of readiness on your part to continue giving us the political support and cooperation which we so much need in order to be of greater service. The years ahead are difficult. I will therefore need the support of all Member States if our Organization's efforts are to make a difference in terms of retrieving the lives of Africans from the brink and restoring hope to them.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I take particular note of the fact that I was first elected as Secretary General in 1989 under the Chairmanship of President Moubarak. It is indeed a happy coincidence that I have now been re-elected again during President Moubarak's Chairmanship.

Cairo and Egypt evoke feelings of emotion and nostalgia to me. It was here, that as a young man, I began my diplomatic career as Ambassador of my country back in 1964. It was also during my tenure as Ambassador that I had the opportunity to be part of a historic encounter of Africa's leaders in their first Summit of the Organization of African Unity in the same year. Twenty-nine years later as Africa returns to Cairo to renew its faith and rededicate itself to the OAU, I look back at the period that the Continent has traversed, and draw inspiration from it notwithstanding the difficulties we have encountered.

**Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In the introduction to my report which is before this Assembly, I dwelt at length on the many issues and problems which face our Continent. I therefore do not propose to make a long expose but to limit myself to a few remarks.

This Assembly is meeting in the wake of celebrating thirty years of the founding of the Organization of African Unity. It is a celebration of the enduring faith we have in the Organization and of its achievements. It is a celebration

of the Unity of Africa and of the solidarity between its people. It is a celebration of freedom which our collective efforts have brought about; and it is a celebration of the ability of the OAU to survive and endure. Indeed we have cause to look back at what we have been able to do with a justifiable sense of accomplishment. But commemorations also provide opportunities for reflection and introspection. They are occasions of self-criticisms and rededication. We should therefore put our achievements in context, and to see where we have been, where we are, what is left to be done, how and with what means it can be done. It is to give ourselves the opportunity to take lessons from the past and to build on the strength of our achievements.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Unity and international solidarity has brought us close to defeating racial bigotry and to dismantling the structures of apartheid in South Africa. We have covered appreciable ground and are encouraged by the progress made in the negotiations within the multiparty framework and the setting of a date for elections in April next year. The road to a free, non-racial, democratic and United South Africa is still fraught with difficulties and notwithstanding the stage we have reached we need to exercise vigilance and not to allow complacency to set in. In the meantime the Liberation Movements will need our undivided support especially at this time when they face the difficult task of organizing and taking part in the elections scheduled for next year.

But beyond the elections and the establishment of transitional arrangements to guide South Africa into the creation of a new society founded on equality and justice, lies the more difficult task of managing political transition in that country. For, if South Africa as a society, reconciles with itself and manages to effect transition to the new society, it will have provided an example for the continent and the rest of the world. If however, political transition is not well managed, and if people fail to reconcile and to find common ground, that failure will have far reaching implications to peace in that country and beyond. We encourage the parties to do their utmost to sustain the process of transition and not to succumb to the difficulties of the hour. Again, in this, the people of South Africa will need our unity and solidarity.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The unity of our countries and the Continent now stand threatened by the spectre of conflicts. The wars raging on in our Continent, and the destruction, in human and material terms which they have brought has exacted a heavy price on the Continent. Our efforts at economic recovery, the prospects of enhancing democracy, of consolidating the institutions of promoting human rights and of generally building a new Africa which we want, stand in limbo in the face of unending civil strife and wars.

In Dakar last year, this Assembly decided on the principle of establishing, within the OAU, a Mechanism to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts. It was a landmark decision signalling the resolve of Africa to make a radical

departure from limiting political circumstances and to proceed with determined action to deal with conflicts. It was a decision rooted in African belief in itself, in its ability to act and do so decisively. Above all, it was a statement of determination, of Africa telling the world, that it wants to begin and do so in earnest, with the task of dealing decisively with conflicts and conflict situations. The Assembly will have opportunity to examine the Draft Declaration on the Mechanism which was considered and agreed upon by the Council of Ministers and submitted to this august Assembly for decision.

This is therefore a historic opportunity, to give ourselves institutional means to complement our political efforts at conflict resolution. The Mechanism we hope to adopt, will be an instrument of peace. It will enable Africa to respond more readily in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. What is fundamental is the overriding need for Africa to empower itself and to be able to play the pivotal role in matters of conflicts in the Continent. It is to be able to say that even if we may need international cooperation, we shall do so on the terms we deem most beneficial to us in the sense of promoting the peaceful resolution of the Conflicts.

The Mechanism we propose may not be the answer to all our problems. Certainly, the answers to our problems lie in our ability to take political decisions which do not precipitate conflict. But at the same time, the Mechanism, will fill in the gap where political polarization threatens to undermine peace and harmony. It will be a continuous exercise of adjustment to situations and of accumulating experience. With

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time and given political will, we can strengthen the Mechanism and develop it into a strong instrument in the service of peace on the Continent. But at the same time, it will not be realistic to expect the Mechanism to function effectively and generate the required results if Member States do not reinforce it with their political will and undivided confidence as well as providing it with commensurate resources. Its ability to be effective, will hinge on Africa's unity and confidence in it, and their preparedness to make use of it.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The strength of Africa has never been conceived of or expressed in military or economic terms, but in its unity and solidarity. Our strength has always been in the force of our argument and power of the truth expressed collectively. Our strength has lied in constant and unfailing adherence to principles of justice and International Legality. In our arguments for decolonization, for the establishment of the New International Order, or for the promotion and strengthening of non-alignment, we based ourselves on these principles.

But adherence on principle by itself noble as it may be, is not enough given the realities of international politics. We knew as much. We brought unity and solidarity to support our arguments and therefore, we were heard. We demonstrated common purpose and resolve to act collectively. And we were listened to. It was not because we were militarily strong or that we could exert economic pressure on the world. It was because we were united, we acted together and we spoke in one voice. Experience has shown that our weakness was equally

most manifest when we strayed away and departed from principles; or wavered on them. Our weakness was equally most manifest when we failed to forge unity or to demonstrate solidarity. The fortunes of the OAU have seesawed and drifted between these two end-points of unity and of disunity.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I speak of unity and solidarity because I believe, Africa now perhaps more than at any other time since independence, needs them most. The world we live in now is a changed world. It is a world without the cold war from which we found refuge in non-alignment and in the ideological contradictions between the super powers. It is a world getting more and more insular in thinking and in which benevolent internationalism is on the retreat. The developed countries are increasingly looking inward to address their many internal problems as well. Interest in the poverty of Africa is dwindling even if we shall continue to be assured that it is not the case. There is now emerging a new world order and Africa has to strive to make serious input in its elaboration. Economic problems in the Continent are mounting while critical decisions on the future of global commerce and economic activity are being made without the active participation of Africa. And we see increasing trends of unilateralism even when it comes to African issues.

**Mr. Chairman,**

All these negative trends are consolidating when Africa is threatened by the forces of division. Politics of intolerance are threatening the foundations of unity and

cohesion of our societies. These and other symptoms of disunity must be cured if we are to safeguard the foundations on which our societies rest.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Our countries now face monumental economic problems. The incomes of our countries have fallen and their ability to provide basic services such as education and health is under severe strain. The diseases which we thought had been eradicated are re-emerging. We are however determined to take measures, some politically risky and socially painful, to ensure that the underlying weaknesses of our economies are corrected. Restructuring and economic reforms are now taking root in the Continent. Inherent in these efforts is the collective realization that, ultimately Africa has no credible choice except to take the reigns of economic development in its own hands. Individually, our countries are making much effort and programmes targeted at reversing economic decline at restoring growth and productively, creating jobs and stimulating economic development, are being implemented. Central to these programmes is the realization that reforms notwithstanding, the long-term basis for sustainable economic development cannot be consolidated without investing in people. And our countries are challenging the rigidities of orthodox restructuring to bring to the process a perspective which takes the objective conditions and needs of Africa into account.

**Mr. Chairman,**

These individual efforts are important. However, within the broader objective of bringing economic development to Africa, they cannot continue without continental synchronization and harmonization. The signing of the Abuja Treaty on the establishment of an African Economic Community was a clarion call to unity and to action. We therefore must endeavour to speed up the ratification of the Treaty so that we may begin building the African Economic Community we need and want.

**Mr. Chairman,**

We need unity in Africa for the benefits it will bring in terms of enabling us pull together. More so, however, we need unity and solidarity to face the world. We cannot be heard effectively at the international scene without solidarity and unity. We cannot negotiate the excruciating debt burden which our countries are shouldering without doing so in unity and solidarity.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Unity in the continent will give us the strength to stand for what is right and what we believe in. It will be the beginning of full liberation - liberation from subserviency of thought and from dependence. However, to make that progress towards liberation more meaningful and to give it solid ground to build on, we shall have to see our unity in the larger perspective. It must be unity which transcends the borders of

our continent to embrace the rest of the developing world and enables us to build bridges of solidarity and cooperation. And meeting in Cairo as we are, no aspect of cooperation comes more readily to mind than Afro-Arab Cooperation.

Afro-Arab Cooperation must be built and strengthened. It cannot be allowed to continue drifting aimlessly in the surreal world of diplomatic deference. It must be anchored in the firm ground of principles and find concrete expression in programmes of cooperation. To do so, we need to enjoin our countries and people into a partnership, to promote cooperation and realize the immense potential which exist in both the African and Arab world. We have resources, both material and financial which can combine to form a formidable positive force for human development in our respective parts. But to realize that, we need unity and cooperation. We need to be sincere and objective so that we can defeat the forces of division which work to keep us apart and prevent us to cooperate. Egypt, being at the crossroads of cultures and civilizations, can be the pivot of Afro-Arab Cooperation. Let us therefore resolve to start in a determined manner on the road to meaningful cooperation.

**Mr. Chairman,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The people of Africa have great ambition for the Organization. They expect it to perform and they know that it has the ability to do so. This is why they express so much frustration when the Organization is found wanting. When it does not respond effectively to the problems before the

continent. The expressions of anguish which echo repeatedly in the press, in popular discussions must be heard and responded to. The response which the people of Africa need is to see action. It is to see an Organization which is equipped; one which is confident in itself, and has the ability to act.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Today Africa is faced with a formidable challenge of putting its priorities right and deploying adequate means to their realization. It is a challenge which can only be faced in unity, and collective action. It is a challenge which cannot be met outside the framework of cooperation. The OAU is the only body we have which is a repository of our collective thinking and is an embodiment of our collective will. It is our testament of unity. It is our most viable means. It is our instrument of peace and of collective economic development in the Continent. It must therefore be made to perform. It has proven experience and solid accomplishments, it has the potential to do more.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The OAU can act and make a difference only if Member States want it to do so and are prepared to give it the means. It cannot do so if Member States fail to demonstrate confidence in it and its ability to act. It cannot do so, if Member States withhold from it adequate means with which to act.

Today, we must therefore rededicate ourselves to the OAU, to its achievements and to its future. We must demonstrate full confidence in it and we should show that we have faith in it. If we give it a task we should be prepared to give it the means to perform and above all we must be prepared to give it strong support and not to take the first opportunity to undermine it and give the detractors of our Continent reason to perpetuate hostile argument of its lack of capacity and effectiveness.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Political will, confidence and adequate means from our countries are the ingredients of a powerful and effective OAU. A continent secure in unity, will be able to project itself and make positive impact on the world scene. A continent mired in confusion, limited by its political ambivalence and crippled by its disunity will not emerge to claim its rightful role in the world. We must therefore seize this opportunity to clear our political ambivalence and cast away the shackles of disunity and begin on the road of building a new society we want. Africa can do it. Its people have the will, the strength and the determination.

This year, we celebrate thirty years of the OAU; of its tenacity and dedication to the cause of Africa. Africa was able to prevail over the divisive forces of the cold war, to consolidate common identity, to play a positive role in world politics, because it was united.

Africa has today new and enormous challenges. We cannot hope to overcome them without Unity and we cannot hope to forge ahead without acting in solidarity. Today we have the opportunity to rekindle the spirit of the founding fathers and to give greater meaning to our freedom. We can and must resolve to consolidate and reinvigorate the bonds which unite us and to work together for the peace, progress and prosperity of Africa. It is the key to our future.

I thank you.