

Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim

OAU: I am not a candidate for a new mandate

Lockerbie: No reason to respect sanctions on Libya

For the first time, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim reveals that he will not seek a new mandate as Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity. He also discusses the verdict of the Lockerbie trial in an exclusive interview granted to West Africa Editor Adama GAYE in Khartoum, Sudan during the recent Summit of the Community of Sahelian and Saharan States.

WA: The Organisation of African Unity seems ready again to get involved in the Lockerbie issue. Why such a move?

SAS: We have always been involved in this crisis. We said that we wanted to see those responsible for this dastardly act brought to justice. We condemn terrorism in all its forms, and we have condemned this particular act of

should be tried in a neutral place. The OAU sent a permanent observer, a very distinguished Nigerian jurist, who was representing both our organisation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

WA: How do you react to the verdict?

SAS: Now that the judgment has been given, we at the OAU believe there is no longer a basis for the continuation of the sanctions against Libya. The Libyan government has extended full co-operation. From that moment we have called for the lifting of the sanctions. There has been a trial and the judges have acquitted one of the suspects and convicted the other one. There is an appeal in the case of the convicted suspect. But there is a general feeling, not just based on sentiments, but on the comments made by the media, including the Western media, such as the *New York Times*, that there were some political factors which also seem to have questioned the judgement handed down.

WA: Are you implying this was a political verdict?

SAS: It was not strictly based on legalistic terms. And I can understand the view taken by the leaders of the Community of Sahelian and Saharan States here in Khartoum. They felt that since the Libyans have fulfilled their responsibilities and have followed the

collective advice given to them by African countries, it is not fair to continue with sanctions.

WA: This meeting said the Lockerbie verdict is a political one.

SAS: That is the position of the leaders who met here. And certainly when the OAU meets next month in Libya we will discuss the Lockerbie verdict. We hope to have by then a proper briefing on the matter.

WA: In 1998, the OAU at its Ouagadougou Summit decided unilaterally to disregard UN sanctions against Libya. Will you maintain such a hard stance?

SAS: The lifting was not unilateral. It corresponded to sentiments expressed outside Africa. We believe that since Libya co-operated in the trial there is no basis for the implementation of sanctions against it.

WA: Don't you have the feeling that there might be a slight chance that the person found guilty may indeed be guilty?

SAS: Whoever is guilty should be brought to justice. Whether there have been some political calculations in the trial is debatable. But other people share our uneasiness about the trial.

WA: Should the OAU lead the fight against the implementation of sanctions on Libya?

SAS: There is no reason whatsoever for African countries to respect such sanctions. They have been suspended. Besides, as President Obasanjo



Stepping down: OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim

terrorism. But certain procedures should be followed. And together with other international and regional organisations we have been the ones saying that the two Libyan suspects

observed, it is not right to hold a country liable for an act committed somewhere by one of his citizens. Libya was not on trial, and its government has not been found guilty of any crime.

WA: Have you made this position known to the British and the Americans?

SAS: They know our position. Our desire is not confrontation but to contribute to a process of normalisation between them and Libya.

WA: What would you like to say to the families of the victims?

SAS: We absolutely sympathise with them. Anyone of us could have been a victim of such a terrorist act.

WA: What's your response to the theory, which says other countries and groups, such as Iran, Syria and the Palestinians, are the real culprits?

SAS: We have not been involved in the investigation. But no options should be ruled out. It is a mistake to focus on a particular country.

WA: Next month when the OAU meets in Libya the election of the secretary-general will be a hot topic. Are you a candidate for another term as some have speculated?

SAS: I am not a candidate. I have had the honour to occupy that position for three terms. That is unprecedented. I have no desire to present myself for another term. I have enjoyed the confidence of the leaders of African governments. It has been a challenging assignment. I have done my best to serve the continent. Sometimes my best was not good enough. But there are four candidates already.

WA: Who are they?

SAS: Those who have been presented formally are Ibrahima Fall, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Senegal and now Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations; Lansana Kouyate, current Executive Secretary of ECOWAS; the Foreign Minister of Swaziland and the Minister for Women

and Social Affairs of Namibia, a lady.

WA: What should be the qualities of the next secretary-general?

SAS: He should be able to provide commitment and service to Africa. He should be able also to understand the complexity of the African political scene. When you are secretary-general of the organisation you represent 53 States.

This is a very challenging position. But it can be also very frustrating. It requires patience, ability to listen and capacity to take advice and to be able to communicate. The next secretary-general or Chairman of the Commission, once the African Union Treaty enters into force, should work hard to make the organisation relevant to the ordinary African. I have tried to do so myself but we have not succeeded, as I would like. It is important to carry along the ordinary African so that the organisation will have a strong constituency. The next secretary-general should also take into account the realities of a changed international situation and he should strive to make the organisation relevant to political and economic changes, including globalisation of the world economy.

WA: Is the African Treaty dead considering that fewer than 15 countries have so far ratified it instead of the 36 needed for its entry into force? This does not seem to augur well for the forthcoming Sirte Summit early next month.

SAS: It is not dead. One has to take this thing in perspective. The Treaty was adopted in July 2000 in Lome. Forty-one countries have signed the constitutive act. An overwhelming majority of African states have accepted, therefore, the fact of the Union. The process of ratification varies from one country to another. Some go through Parliament others have a longer process. Take the experience of the Abuja Treaty, which was signed in 1991. It took us three years before it came into force. We were hoping and are still hoping that we will be on a faster track concerning the African Union Treaty. Whether or not we get the required number of

ratification, the Sirte Summit assumes importance because we will be discussing the path towards the African Union.

WA: Deep down do you think this project will see the light of the day?

SAS: I am absolutely convinced about that despite the weaknesses in the Treaty. They will be addressed. No matter how, because we all know that the only way to have a strong Africa is to take the issue of unity and solidarity seriously.

WA: Do you think African unity should be the top challenge for Africa in the 21st century?

SAS: Yes. This century must not be the one when Africa talks only about unity but acts upon this goal and achieve it.

WA: What do you do about the many conflicts in Africa? Peace efforts have so far not been successful. Why?

SAS: I can only explain it by the irrationality of humanity. We all recognise that our countries need peace and stability and yet despite all the efforts made by the OAU and other groupings, these conflicts are sustained. It is only when the parties in conflict are willing to co-operate that peace will take place.

WA: Is the Democratic Republic of Congo poised to return to peace after the death of Kabila senior?

SAS: There is reason for some cautious optimism. After the trip of the new president of Congo, the overall impression of many people is that he is well disposed towards a peaceful solution. But he needs the co-operation of the international community. I am impressed by the position taken by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, to move fast in terms of deployment of observers and peacekeepers. The Security Council is well disposed. All depend on the situation on the field. Two important meetings are scheduled involving the Security Council and the signatories to the Lusaka Agreement.