



Organization of African Unity

THE NEW FACE OF DEVELOPMENT

**Address by H.E. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General of the Organization
of African Unity at the 45th Anniversary
of the International Development Conference**

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

I am indeed honoured to be given this opportunity to deliver an address on the occasion of the 45th Anniversary of the International Development Conference which brings together people from the business community, government and academia and development experts. Permit me therefore to express my appreciation to the organizers of the 1997 International Development Conference and especially to Robert J. BERG for this invitation. The perspective I bring to this conference is an African one. It is a perspective that looks at the challenges facing Africa, foremost of which is confronting the vagaries of underdevelopment.

The preoccupation of the African Continent with the challenge of development goes back to the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. It was then, that the African leaders of the time, manifested a commitment and a desire to work together not only for the liberation of the African Continent but also for the social and economic development of the Continent. It was the former however, i.e. the struggle for the liberation of the continent from colonial and racist rule, that as a matter of necessity, preoccupied the OAU for the thirty years that followed.

The emergence of a new democratic and non-racial South Africa marked the end of that long political struggle, and the beginning of another intensive struggle for social and economic upliftment.

In keeping with the theme of the Conference, I would like therefore to reflect on what I consider to be the major characteristic of the new face of development in the context of Africa's efforts towards socio-economic development and transformation. I am of the view that the New Face of Development should address, simultaneously, the pressing concerns over poverty eradication and other related issues as well as the resolution of conflicts in Africa.

During the past thirty years, many of our African countries have gone through various types of political, social and economic experimentation. The beginning of this decade of the Nineties, brought Africa to the stark reality of the fundamental changes that had been set in motion, in the international system and exacting of it, by the same token, the imperative need to address her own political, social and economic problems as a matter of urgency.

It is my conviction that for the new face of development to emerge in Africa, our thoughts and efforts must be engaged at three fronts. These are:-

1. The Conflict Resolution Front;
2. The Democratization Front; and
3. The Social and Economic Development Front.

On the conflict resolution front, it is important to recognize the tragic impact of conflicts on African societies. These conflicts, which often explode into open hostilities, arise mainly out of differences and contentions over the distribution, control of or access to power and resources. They are further exacerbated by conditions of poverty as well as by the less than desirable structure of power in a given society. There is no doubt that gross inequality in society creates insecurity through threat perception among some sections of the society particularly among the poor as they are denied the much needed opportunity to engage in productive work.

The new face of development that we envisage must grapple with these hard realities prevailing in our African societies. It must address the scourge of conflicts in Africa which has significantly slowed down the pace of development in the region as efforts towards poverty eradication are continuously undermined by the absence of social harmony in acutely polarized communities. There is ample evidence that poverty is one of the major root causes of conflict and addressing conflicts must, therefore of necessity, be accompanied by specific measures to address poverty.

There is no doubt that poverty breeds conflicts as conflicts breed poverty and conflicts do have devastating effects on Africa's development process. Unfortunately, the impact of conflict on human resources as a major factor in development is not given the necessary attention in the evaluation of the macro-economic performance. Africa's major development capital is its human resources which, together with its abundance of land and natural resources, could, in the absence of conflict, contribute significantly to Africa's development process.

There is also evidence to suggest that glaring inequalities in the structure of the international system have worked to exacerbate the conditions of the poor people through top down development approaches and prescriptions that do not take into account the grass-root realities and interests. Such approaches perpetuate, if not strengthen, the stratification within societies and therefore contribute to increasing the propensity for tension and conflicts in the region. Poor governance and the absence of strategies to create checks and balances in structures of power and the reluctance of some of those in power to address injustice, inequity, arbitrariness and acts of impunity have introduced a new factor hostile to peace in the region. Most of those at the bottom of the social ladder have no say in what the State could do and how it should do it and for what purpose. Indeed, there is no flow of information between the institutions of the state and the people thus leading to a complete absence of dialogue that

is so vital to nation-building. In other words, the people at the grass roots are relegated to the periphery of governance and the decision making process. Yet, these are the very people in the Continent who constitute the major actors in the development process.

The need for a development model that is based on and takes due account of equality of all before the law and avoids politics of ethnic, regional, social and religious exclusion is imperative. The New Face of Development must seek to avoid deprivation, humiliation and vulnerability of the poor. It must address human rights issues, income inequality, do away with authoritarianism, humiliation, fear and impunity. Moreover, it must address the scourge of corruption and mismanagement which is undermining the social fabric of African societies. Inability to address these issues allows the processes of exclusion and humiliation to continue unabated, if not to become more encrusted in society. Indeed, the New Face of Development must promote the interests of the people by taking into account their inherent creativity, capacities, history and sense of value.

The acknowledged truth about conflict is that, without peace there can be no security, and without security there is no stability, and the absence of stability impedes development. In our efforts to build peace in Africa, the OAU is spearheading the African drive towards conflict

prevention, management and resolution, democratization and socio-economic development and cooperation.

On the democratization front, African Governments have committed themselves to the democratization of their societies. What this means in essence as well as in fact, is that the establishment of popular-based political processes that are designed to involve the African people in general and the youth and women in particular, are gradually taking root and now constitute the most dynamic way of harnessing the forces for development. While the process of democratization in Africa, has experienced some set-backs, the reaffirmation by most African governments of their commitment to pursue the democratization process on the basis of their historical, political and socio-economic values, stands out as a source of encouragement.

The institutionalization of the basic principles of democracy and the mechanisms that underpin them, do take time before they can emerge as solid pillars of democracy. I am encouraged as I see the process of democratization taking root in various parts of Africa today. I am confident that democratic political systems will continue to evolve on the basis of popular participation, the rule of law, as well as respect for and the promotion of human rights in all its dimensions.

Let me, however, emphasize the point that it would be a serious fallacy to believe that the holding of multi-party elections and putting in place an elected government are the end of the story, or an effective guarantee of democracy. While we appreciate the support from our partners of the international community in the holding of elections, Africa needs new forms of partnership and genuine support in order for it to develop and strengthen the democratic culture and more specifically to establish the indispensable institutions that constitute the foundation for an enduring democratic system namely the legislature, the judiciary, the executive and a free and vibrant media.

In addition, there is need to enhance the participation of the civil society, including non-governmental organizations, in the process of the democratic rebuilding of Africa. The strengthening of a democratic culture of understanding and tolerance is indeed a long-term programme that requires careful and sustained nurturing.

A fact that many people may not have been aware of, is the concern of the Organization of African Unity for the establishment of effective, enduring and viable democratic systems and the pursuit of good governance in Africa. At the July 1990 OAU Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. African leaders declared their commitment to promote popular participation in the process of government and development and a political

environment that would guarantee human rights and the observance of the rule of law, as well as ensure high standards of probity and accountability, particularly on the part of those who hold public office.

This commitment and the rising wave of democratization have raised legitimate expectations on the part of the African citizen. However, the process is still fragile and needs to be sustained. It is only when democracy takes firm root in Africa that there will be an effective guarantee that all the energies and resources of the continent can be channelled towards poverty eradication and conflict prevention. We believe that collective action and genuine partnership are necessary to give peace and development a chance in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

On the socio-economic front, joint action and new forms of partnership are also required to tackle the critical issues related to food self-sufficiency, health, environment and the apparently insoluble problem of Africa's external debt, the building and strengthening of capacities in Africa, the support to regional integration, the enhancement of the role of the private sector and the promotion of foreign direct investment.

While Africa's aggregate economic performance shows a seeming improvement with the rate of GDP growth estimated at more than 3 per cent for both 1995 and 1996 as compared to a lower average in 1990 and 1994, the African continent continues to be the only region in the world where economic performances have been generally unsatisfactory, with prospects which are not too bright in the short to medium term.

Significantly, after more than two decade of reforms, the economic status of most African countries remains fragile and disarticulated. But, despite a generally difficult international economic environment, a few countries have, however, been able to establish conditions propitious to macro-economic stability and sustainable growth. Such countries have experienced significant improvements in growth, trade and financial flows. Nonetheless, in most of the countries, the socio-economic framework remains fraught with weaknesses and inefficiencies which have interacted to inhibit growth. This trend has contributed towards the spreading and deepening of poverty, resulting in the deterioration of human conditions. In such economies, the immediate challenge would be put in place appropriate macro-economic frameworks to ensure sustainable growth and to marshall the energies of the people towards productive and peaceful activities.

In spite of our efforts to address these challenges of peace and development, we are experiencing, in the continent, a donor-withdrawal syndrome characterized by a fast declining international interest in Africa, at a time when our Continent is in dire need of genuine partnership to forge ahead in its resolve to address the serious challenges inherent in its political and economic transition programmes. In this new partnership that we are seeking, the developed countries and particularly the USA should not be seen to withdraw from their responsibilities in an increasingly interdependent world. It is indeed in the mutual interest of both the developed countries and Africa that the efforts of our continent are strongly supported and sustained. Africa does present great opportunities for investments particularly by the private sector and constitute a potentially large market in the global trading system. We should have in mind that at the end of the day, Africa must emerge, sooner than later, as a true partner in world economic and political affairs.

One of the major endeavours of the OAU since the beginning of this decade is the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, which came into force in May 1994. We are now engaged in the implementation process of the Treaty and the gradual construction of the Community which is based on the harmonization and coordination of the efforts and integration activities deployed at the level of the various Regional Economic Communities.

Africa is also determined to address the scourge of food shortages and famine. Behind this situation are such natural disasters as drought and flooding, as well as man-made problems of conflicts. Much of the food insecurity in the African continent, however, is due to poor agricultural practices, inadequate tools, storage and distribution facilities, which can only be addressed through joint and concerted action. The new face of development should therefore focus on a global strategy to eradicate famine and ensure that food does not become a political weapon.

The other issue of serious concern is the state of health in the African continent, the prevalence of debilitating diseases and the reappearance of diseases which were thought to have been eradicated. The AIDS pandemic belongs to a special category. The whole world must unite to ensure that advances in the medical sciences in all regions of the world, including traditional medicines, are put to the benefit of humankind and particularly of the African continent.

The threat to the environment is also another issue of a global concern. Unfortunately, that concern has not been of the same degree on the issue of desertification that poses a major threat to Africa. The rapid encroachment of the desert is directly related to the fast disappearance of the rain forests and the prevalence of drought. What is required therefore is an action plan that is targeted at checking and reversing the advance of the

desert on the one hand, and on the other, accelerating reforestation. Such action should also encompass the energy problem in rural areas.

We also believe that Africa's multilateral debt should be addressed as a priority. In this respect, we strongly support and encourage the efforts of the IMF and the World Bank to make a real impact on multilateral debt. I would like to use this platform to make a special appeal to the Paris Club members, to liberalize further their rescheduling terms and to consider seriously debt cancellation. I should like to stress that it is now recognized that Africa cannot repay this debt and concurrently pursue its development efforts fruitfully. Although the issue of debt cancellation is essentially economic and financial, it is increasingly becoming a political issue and needs to be addressed as such by creditor governments.

To effectively manage and implement economic, political and social reforms on the continent, Africa needs the support and experience of the international community to deal with issues of human and institutional capacity building. In developing joint action and partnership to assist African countries formulate and implement capacity building strategies, attention has to be focussed on the critical areas of science and technology development, to meet the needs of the priority economic sectors of

agriculture, industry, transport and communications. The issue of human resource development should also be tackled on a long-term basis, especially in the areas of education, health and science.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have strived to briefly describe some elements that must, in my view, be taken into account in articulating the new face of development. But I wish to emphasize in conclusion that beyond and above these elements, what is crucial is the need for a true partnership in development based on a common approach. I do not foresee any meaningful progress in facing the challenges of development in our continent without determined and concerted efforts by Africans themselves with maximum and sustained support from the developed world. In the new face of development, we should therefore commit ourselves as members of the global village to address as a common front the challenge of poverty eradication, the scourge of conflicts as well as the serious problems of environmental degradation, food security and health. We should, together, envisage to build a new era of cooperation for collective peace and shared development.