



Organization of African Unity

**REMARKS BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE ANNUAL RECEPTION
FOR THE OAU GENERAL SECRETARIAT STAFF**

**OAU HEADQUARTERS, CONGO HALL
ADDIS ABABA**

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**Remarks by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the OAU,
at the Annual Reception for the OAU General Secretariat Staff
Congo Hall - 26 January 2001**

I wish, at the very outset, to request you to observe a minute of silence in memory of the passing away of President Laurent Desiré Kabila of the DRC.

It has been traditional, whenever possible, to have this annual reception in which as staff of the General Secretariat we meet and celebrate the achievements of the past year, and also to rededicate ourselves to a better performance in the following year. It is in this spirit that I would like to congratulate all of you for the contribution you have made to our Continental Organization and for the various successes we have gained together, as members of the General Secretariat in the past year.

Apart from the challenging tasks and responsibilities we were assigned by the decision-making organs of the Organization in promoting peace, security and stability; in conflict resolution; in fostering cooperation and integration; in promoting development; and in improving the welfare of the African peoples, the year 2000 also witnessed the commencement of the actual implementation of the restructuring exercise.

I would like to express my appreciation for the commitment, dedication, determination and perseverance demonstrated by the staff – and I look forward to a continuation and enhancement of this spirit as we embark into this new year.

Dear colleagues,

This is the 12th year since I took over the office of the Secretary General. I consider this to be a great honour and privilege given to me by our Leaders, our Governments, and the Peoples of this Continent. It has also been a privilege to work with all of you who are here, and with the colleagues who have left the Secretariat for one reason or another.

You may remember that as I took over the Office of the OAU Secretary General on 19 September 1989, there were profound changes taking place internationally and which had a major impact on our Continent. It was also a time when Africa was making the final onslaught against colonialism and apartheid. This was a period of great challenge for individual Member States, for the Continent as a collective, and for the Organization itself. We were at a cross road.

Remarkably, today, 2001, we can look back and take pride for our Continental Organization. During the decade of the 1990s, a challenging decade, one which was quite tumultuous for our Continent, our Organization has remained steadfast and consistent in its endeavours. It did not equivocate, it did not hesitate, it remained intact, and fully engaged in the affairs of this Continent notwithstanding the many constraints we have had to encounter and are still encountering. And this, it did not do in an ad-hoc manner, or without somber reflection. It was done on the basis of a clear collective vision – that all of us here should be proud to be associated with.

You may recall the 1990 Summit, held here in Addis Ababa, which not only expressed a collective vision of where Africa needs to go, but also where our leaders made a commitment to define a different era for the Continent and to have the people of this Continent take full

responsibility in defining their destiny. In the process, African leaders adumbrated the challenges as well as the opportunities that lay ahead in the post cold war era. I believe that as members of the General Secretariat we can derive satisfaction that we have endeavoured to live up to what has been expected of us in realizing that vision.

Among other things, we have seen the total eradication of colonialism as well as the elimination of the apartheid system and the emergence of a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa. We all recall with pride when President Nelson Mandela visited us here at Headquarters soon after his release from prison and what that visit symbolized.

We recall the signing in Abuja, in 1991, of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and its coming into force in 1994. We have managed, in this respect, to promote a closer interaction with the Regional Economic Communities.

The OAU has also seen the steady but definite contribution of our Continental Organization in the inculcation and strengthening of the culture of democratization and respect of human rights. We have witnessed increasing involvement in dealing with conflict situations and especially internal conflicts which previously were considered as no-go areas. We now have a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution established in Cairo in 1993;

We have been able to maintain, sustain and enhance the Organization's relevance continentally and internationally, including developing active and constructive interaction with external powers and regional and international institutions;

In these years, we have also worked to particularly improve the infrastructure of the General Secretariat. We now have a Conflict Management Centre, an official Residence of the Secretary-General and we are in the process of completing a Conference-cum-Secretariat complex right here in the compound of the Headquarters of our Organization. As part of our efforts to redynamize the Organization, a restructuring has been launched. Throughout our efforts and our actions, we have endeavoured to maintain the spirit of Pan-Africanism within the General Secretariat and in the perspective and working modalities of our Continental Organization;

Finally, we have been privileged to be actively involved in the Continent's march towards the African Union as adumbrated by our leaders in Sirte, Libya, and in Lome, Togo.

Accomplishing these tasks has been quite challenging. We have had to function, in most cases, with the same level of capacities – human, financial, and institutional that have existed in the 37 years' existence of the Organization. I wish to pay tribute to all staff for the contribution you have made for those accomplishments.

Obviously, as the Secretary-General, and also my elected colleagues, we are bound to get direct or indirect criticism in the process of fulfilling our responsibilities. Some of the criticisms have been constructive and some may have been unjustified – but I believe that all of us have the best intentions and are committed to the ideals of this Organization.

Dear Colleagues

In a little more than 7 months, I shall have completed unprecedented three terms as the Secretary-General of our Continental Organization. As I said earlier, it has been a great honour and privilege to be given the confidence that I received. I have endeavoured to serve with humility, commitment and dedication.

With all the work that we have done together, it is very important, however, to ensure that my successor takes over an Organization which is dynamic, responsive, and efficient enough to sustain and reinvigorate the accomplishments and to meet the challenges ahead of us. Therefore, it is my intention to make full use of the remaining period to work with all of you to finalize some of the important work which is in the pipeline. This relates mostly to modernizing our Organization, improving the way we do business, systematically working towards improving the working environment as well as qualitatively changing as far as possible the physical environment of our Headquarters.

The restructuring process is now on course. I would like to pay tribute to the Transition Team and its Director – for launching the exercise and putting in place the framework and for initiating the first tasks, some of which have been painful.

I have now reconstituted the Team and realigned its focus – now Change Management Team, under the leadership of the Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Administration and Finance - with the basic task of mainstreaming change in the functioning of the Organization. In order to succeed in this endeavour, the Team needs the

support of all staff, and that all staff have to identify with the change and they have to be on board.

Some of the critical areas that I have assigned the team to address in the next few months include:

- the concerns relating to staff motivation.
One aspect of this is the exercise of career development that I have already received some recommendations and others will follow;
- the necessity of sharing a common vision of where this Organization is going, and to translate this into concrete activities in our respective areas of work;
- the need to develop an integrated functioning of our Organization. To avoid rigid departmentalization, and projectizing activities – to be driven by wholistic objectives;
- the need to develop an organizational culture that fosters commitment and efficiency;
- to achieve all these, we will – in the next few months – improve our administrative technology, modernize the work environment for all staff, and launch a training programme;
- I have also been informed that proposals for reforming the systems and methods have been prepared. So, we intend to embark into re-examining our rules and procedures and changing some of our systems.

Let me be clear. I am not talking of completing all these during my remaining term of office. Rather, I am calling for your support in committing ourselves to these goals. The contribution of each and everyone of you is vital. There are areas we can achieve immediate results and there are others which need a slightly longer time to

accomplish. For all these we just need to devote ourselves to them, because they are for our good, and they are in the best interest of our Organization.

I would like to ensure that my successor takes over an Organization which has a legacy of being not only relevant and dynamic Continentally and internationally, but also one which has the internal capacity of responding to the prevailing challenges efficiently and effectively.

I thank you.