

REMARKS BY H.E. MR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE TRAINING SEMINAR FOR THE OAU ON THE EVOLVING ROLE
OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ELECTION MONITORING
ADDIS ABABA, 14 SEPTEMBER 1992

Distinguished representatives of OAU Member States;
Respected representatives of the African American Institute;
the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs;
and Members of the International Faculty assembled;
Participants from the OAU Secretariat,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is with immense pleasure that I extend to you all, a warm welcome to Addis Ababa, headquarters of the OAU, on the occasion of the first ever training seminar for the organization, on the Evolving Role of Intergovernmental Organizations in Election Monitoring, kindly sponsored by the Africa American Institute and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

Allow me, from the very outset, to express our gratitude to both organizations for their ready response to our request for assistance in the organization of this Seminar, and for putting at our disposal an experienced faculty on the subject matter. I would also like to thank ILCA for providing us with excellent facilities enabling us to hold this Seminar in congenial surroundings.

I may, perhaps, be permitted to remark that the organization of the Seminar is as much a novelty for us in the OAU, as is, indeed, its subject-matter - election monitoring - in the context of international relations. As the title

of the Seminar indicates, inter-governmental organizations the world over have only just begun to undergo an evolution in terms of their new role in election monitoring - a development which has occurred in response to the new wind of democratisation sweeping the world, the African continent included. The OAU itself has also very recently begun to accumulate some experience of its own through its election monitoring activities conducted in a number of its Member States, and at the invitation of these states themselves. They include the Comoros, Cape Verde, Zambia, Benin, Mali, Congo and Ethiopia; and, in fact, more requests continue to be received from the Member States. Indeed we expect to be involved in the elections in Angola, Togo, Central African Republic and Lesotho.

In line with the changing priorities of the organization, the OAU Secretariat has regarded and continues to regard such requests with the seriousness they deserve. Further, it has involved representatives of Member States in the composition of election observer teams. One hardly need emphasize that it is precisely because the requests for election observation have come from Member States, that they should be encouraged. This is a very significant development given that it is the very African States which have at times been accused by outsiders of adhering too strictly to the concept of sovereignty and the non interference principle which are themselves asking for involvement by the OAU in this regard. In some cases, some of the requests have strictly stipulated that the OAU as the continental body, should play a leading role and coordinate all other international observer groups.

I am of the view that the mere presence of an external monitoring group, such as that of the OAU, can be of critical importance in maintaining or restoring the mutual trust and confidence of the opposing parties in the democratic transition and the political process as a whole. To that extent, in the short term, the presence of an OAU team can contribute to ensure

that democratic change takes place in an atmosphere devoid of turbulence and disorder; and in the long term it can help lay down the foundation for the gradual evolution of a culture of tolerance and of give-and-take, which are pre-requisites if democratic traditions are to take deep root, permanently in Africa.

It is important to note also that frequently, the conduct of electoral monitoring can also be deployed as part of a comprehensive package of conflict management, either in terms of preventing or diffusing a situation of potential conflict, or in terms of resolving a dispute which has gone out of hand and evolved into a full-blown affair- often bloody and of long-standing.

I need hardly emphasize that conflict management and democratisation are two of the three issues now clearly identified as the priorities of the OAU, the third being socio-economic development and integration. These priorities are, as we know, outlined in the Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking Place in the World, adopted in 1990. This Declaration calls, inter alia, for "further democratisation", "the consolidation of democratic institutions" and "a political environment which guarantees human rights and the observance of the rule of law". The Declaration also calls for "the peaceful and speedy resolution of all the conflicts in our continent", and stipulates, in fact, that in the absence of such democratisation and of such management of conflict, the process of socio-economic transformation and integration, the third priority, is itself compromised if not completely obstructed.

The gains accruing to the successful conduct of the Seminar should, therefore, be three-fold, in terms of democratisation, conflict resolution and socio-economic development and integration. The mind boggles at the negative and chaotic impact arising from our failure to address these priorities, on the peace and security, of both the continent and of the wider international arena..

In the light, therefore, of our thinking, it is absolutely imperative that any involvement by the OAU in election monitoring should extend beyond the confines of mere political symbolism or solidarity, manifested by the mere presence of an OAU observer team. Thus our election observation teams should be fore-armed with the professional training and practical skills required for the evaluation of electoral processes. This is particularly important if the OAU is to be regarded by the ordinary African as an organization that panders to his needs.

The outcome of the conduct of elections in any single Member State will inevitably influence the course of the election process in others. Our capacity must effectively be enhanced to ensure that the process which has started on our continent is sustained. We must and should not fail. I believe this Seminar will make an important contribution to our efforts.

I thank you for your attention.