



ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY
GENERAL OF THE OAU, AT THE OPENING SESSION
OF THE SIXTY FIFTH ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE OAU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

TRIPOLI, LIBYA: 26 FEBRUARY, 1997

**Your Excellency Mr. Ferdinand Leopold Oyono,
Chairman of the 64th Ordinary Session
of the Council of Ministers and Minister
of External Relations of the Republic of Cameroon,**

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to join the Libyan Authorities in welcoming you all, most warmly, to this beautiful and hospitable city of Tripoli, venue of the Sixty-Fifth Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers.

I should like, at the outset, to convey our special gratitude to His Excellency Muammar Gaddafi, the Leader of the Great Al Fateh Revolution and to the entire people of the Great Socialist Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, our deep appreciation for the kind invitation extended to us all to be here, and for the very friendly and warm hospitality we have enjoyed since our arrival on this African soil. We all the more appreciate the significance of this warm and fraternal welcome, when we recall the difficulties experienced and the hardships facing the Libyan people.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing Chairman of the 64th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, Mr. Ferdinand Leopold Oyono, Minister of External Relations of the Republic of Cameroon, for

his support and cooperation. I am confident that I can count on his continued support as we deal with many of the challenges confronting our continental Organization, especially those related to conflict situations as well as the role incumbent on the OAU, and its Central Organ in efforts aimed at resolving them.

Since this is the first Council of Ministers meeting after the change of leadership at the United Nations, I would like to take this opportunity to, once again, pay warm and special tribute to our distinguished brother, an accomplished diplomat and a great son of Africa, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for the invaluable contribution he has made in the service of humanity, during his tenure of office as Secretary General of the United Nations Organization.

Indeed, we, in Africa, take particular pride in the principled and exemplary manner in which Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali discharged his functions at the helm of the United Nations, during a particularly challenging and difficult period in the history of that Organization. He did so with a high sense of responsibility, professionalism and commitment, as well as with impeccable integrity and independence. I remain most confident that Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali will not relent in his efforts to promote the noble principles of human solidarity and international understanding. It is also my fervent hope, that our continent will continue to benefit from his wisdom and vast wealth of experience.

This is also an opportunity for me to reiterate my sincere congratulations to our eminent brother, Kofi Annan, over his election as Secretary General of the

United Nations. His election was, indeed, a recognition of his competence and commitment to the ideals of the United Nations. It was also a tribute to his country, Ghana, which distinguished itself in the struggle for the dignity and freedom of our peoples and Continent and which made an invaluable contribution to the promotion of Pan-africanism, African unity and solidarity. These are indeed, the very ideals which we all, as Africans, cherish and nurture and which are being celebrated as Ghana prepares to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of its independence. Above all, the election of a distinguished African to succeed another distinguished African is a recognition of, and a tribute to Africa's role in world affairs.

I look forward to working closely with the new Secretary General as I did with his predecessor, particularly in the promotion and defence of the interests of our Continent and peoples. I am confident that, given his vast and long-standing international experience, as well as his immense diplomatic skills and human qualities, he will measure up to the daunting challenges that lie ahead.

Mr. Chairman,

As I have already brought to the attention of Council, in my Introductory Note, the main activities and efforts deployed by the Organization in the financial, administrative, socio-economic and political fields since the last Session, I would limit myself to making a few remarks.

My first remark will be to underline that it is not usual for an Ordinary Session of Council normally devoted to budgetary and administrative matters to be held outside the Headquarters of the Organization. Our meeting here, in Tripoli, is therefore of particular significance. It is an expression of our solidarity with the people of Libya at a time when they are confronted with adversity as a result of the imposition of sanctions. Indeed, in spite of the genuine efforts undertaken and the flexibility demonstrated by the Libyan authorities, these sanctions are still in place with the attendant suffering and deprivation inflicted on innocent people. Both the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity have been calling on the United Nations Security Council to reconsider its position and have been advocating for the removal of these sanctions.

As we meet here, therefore, and having witnessed the severe consequences of these sanctions and the immense suffering caused to this country and its people, we must reiterate our unflinching support for and solidarity with our brothers and sisters of the Great Socialist Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Indeed, the very impressive presence of Foreign Ministers and other Ministers here in Tripoli speaks eloquently of that solidarity. It is our sincere hope that our appeal will be heeded, that our call will be heard and that ultimately, the logic of moderation and flexibility would prevail so that a lasting, just and fair solution to this dispute could be found.

As we affirm our solidarity with the people of Libya, we should remind ourselves that our greatest strength in tackling the problems facing our Continent

and peoples lies in our unity and solidarity. We should be able to build on our past achievements in maintaining the type of unity and solidarity that would transcend all kinds of cleavages, either real or artificial. Our ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional diversities must be used as a source of strength and not be allowed to divide us. We have always been able to defend our common interests in the most resolute and effective manner when we closed our ranks and worked in a coordinated manner.

It is my firm belief that this is the place and time, as our continent is being confronted with formidable challenges which could threaten our unity and cohesion, to reaffirm our commitment to work together and not to allow division in our ranks. This is also a unique opportunity to recommit ourselves to the fundamental principles which have sustained our African family of Nations over the past thirty-four years. I suggest that this is the spirit which should continue to guide us in our efforts to achieve peace, security and stability in the Continent.

In this respect, one of the greatest challenges before us is the crisis in the Great Lakes Region and, in particular the conflict in Eastern Zaire which has far-reaching implications for peace, security and stability in the region and the Continent as a whole. We should, for the good of Zaire and also, for the good of the region and of Africa as a whole, assist in resolving the present crisis both in its internal and external dimensions. Our interest is to ensure that Zaire

overcomes the present crisis as a united country, at peace with itself and playing its rightful role in the region and in the continent. Our interest is also to see to it that peace and stability prevail in the region.

It is our duty as Africans to take the lead in the search for a peaceful solution to the crisis based on the principles enshrined in the Charter of our continental Organization and other relevant OAU Conventions and Decisions. These principles which have universal validity and have served our Continent well include : the respect for the unity and territorial integrity of all States the respect of the principle of inviolability of borders; the respect of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of all States; the respect of the legitimate rights of our peoples as well as the resort to the mechanism of dialogue and negotiations as a means of resolving conflicts or settling disputes.

It is in this respect that we have sought, through our efforts in tandem with the United Nations, to work for an end to the crisis. I am encouraged that the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the OAU and the UN, Ambassador Sahnoun, enjoy broad support. The success of these joint efforts, however, will hinge upon our ability to come together in unison and to inspire the people of Zaire and of the region to rise above the present difficulties and seize the opportunity of striving towards peace, stability and security for all. In this connection, of immediate importance is the avoidance of the escalation of the conflict with its attendant catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

As we continue with sustained efforts in Eastern Zaire, we should likewise exert our common solidarity in helping our brothers and sisters in Burundi extricate themselves from the path of mistrust and self-destruction and retrace the road of dialogue and accommodation. The suffering that the conflict has inflicted on the Burundi people for such a long time is painful to us all. This is why, I believe it is necessary for the Burundi people to re-engage themselves more forthrightly with regional efforts to bring a speedy and lasting solution to the crisis. It is my fervent hope that the most recent openings for dialogue can be built upon and expanded so that enabling conditions can be created, in Burundi itself and within the region, to rekindle the spirit of partnership and cooperation which is required to bring about a sustainable and comprehensive solution to the problem.

I speak of solidarity of purpose and action because I know what difference they can make in overcoming narrow parochial interests and embracing a greater cause of peace for a Nation. This is evident in Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia, where protracted and painful conflicts show promise of final resolution as leaders in these countries now demonstrate greater preparedness to take heed of the concerted urging of Africa for peace. I remain hopeful that the same spirit of unity of purpose and solidarity will enable current efforts to bring lasting peace to Somalia to bear fruit. It is also my fervent hope that our repeated calls for dialogue and accommodation will be finally heeded by the two parties to the conflict of Western Sahara and that they will commit themselves to the genuine implementation of the peace plan.

Mr. Chairman,

If our solidarity and unity can lead us to peace, they can also enable us to seize the opportunity which peace provides to achieve economic development. We have committed ourselves, through the Abuja Treaty, to work towards the integration of our continent. Today, we have made efforts to set in motion the initial steps in that direction. However, it is equally self-evident that much more needs to be done to give this ideal of integration the expression of reality. Indeed, we have signed, and many of our countries have ratified the Treaty, but we are yet to demonstrate uncompromising resolve of realizing its objectives. We should strive to defeat self-doubt and tendencies towards division and build upon our shared common vision of a common destiny as a Continent. Our immediate challenge is to strengthen the Regional Economic Communities in our collective enterprise of building a Pan-African Economic Community.

Mr. Chairman,

As we invoke solidarity as the guiding spirit in our efforts to meet the challenges facing us in the political and socio-economic fields, we should endeavour to see how the role of our continental Organization can be enhanced and how the many achievements we have made can be consolidated. Truly, we still have many shortcomings and a lot more needs to be done to make our Organization more responsive and result-driven. This notwithstanding, we must take pride in what we have been able to achieve and where we stand presently.

Today, we are an Organization more attuned to the needs of our Continent. We are an Organization with a clear perspective and with a sense of purpose. We are an Organization whose views and positions are sought and respected. This has been possible because of the unqualified and undivided support and confidence of our Member States. This confidence has been manifested not only in terms of political support but also in terms of the means provided to the Organization to enable it function despite the enormous economic difficulties our countries are experiencing.

In the years ahead, our Organization will have to come to terms with the challenges which the evolving international environment present. We have an agenda which needs to be consolidated and furthered. We have new challenges which need to be dealt with - all requiring a new vision and a new way of doing business. We shall, therefore, have to consider how the Organization can continue to adjust by reforming its working methods and rationalizing its structures so that it could become cost-effective but more efficient.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa has a full and challenging agenda. We have to tackle the thorny issue of conflicts and the suffering and misery that they inflict on our people as exemplified by the millions who have had to vote with their feet. We have to seriously pursue the path of economic integration and deal with the various social

and environmental scourges. We need to reform and adapt our Organization to enable it carry out its responsibilities and live up to the expectations of Member States. This might seem to be an insurmountable hurdle, but it is within our means if we act in a spirit of unity and solidarity, if, indeed, we think as Africans, and act as Africans.