

Secretary General's Talking Notes During the
Closing Session of the Fifth Session of the
Joint Commission on OAU-UNESCO
Cooperation

Addis Ababa, 27-28 January, 1997

From the outset, I should like to take this opportunity to extend a special welcome to Mr. Federico Mayor, the Director General of UNESCO who, in spite of his very busy schedule, has honoured us with his presence today.

Mr. Director General, your presence here with us at the conclusion of the deliberations of the Fifth Session of the OAU/UNESCO Joint Commission as well as the high-level and sizeable UNESCO delegation to this meeting, signifies the importance you attach to the OAU/UNESCO Joint Commission.

I should like to pay special tribute to you and your delegation for the commitment you have personally demonstrated in support of OAU activities in the field of Education, Science and Culture. We at the OAU are encouraged by such support and we look forward for more support in the years ahead as we prepare to resolutely face the challenges of the next millennium. Let me stress here that OAU and UNESCO have a long tradition. It is in this sense that we must build on our previous record of good relationship which has existed for almost three decades. Certainly, the convergence of our interests to assist the African

countries considering the enormity of their problems demand stronger partnership of all the Organizations rendering assistance to Africa.

The Fifth Joint Commission Session has engaged its attention and devoted some time on some of the critical issues and problems facing the continent. Indeed, this Session, like the previous one, has provided an excellent opportunity for our two Secretariats to work out ways and means of strengthening our collaboration in rendering assistance to the continent. In this regard, I should like to pay special tribute to our two Secretariats for the efforts they have exerted in deliberating on these problems.

You have gone through a lengthy Agenda of 14 items and about 30 sub-items in less than 12 hours and I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you most sincerely for the marathon Session. While I do not intend to comment on all the issues that have engaged your attention, I should however, like to make a few random remarks.

I think our relations and cooperation must be adjusted to the new realities facing the world and our continent. Such realities include the fundamental changes that took place in the world, particularly in the 1990s and beyond. They also include the revolution in information technologies and in communication.

Changes in the configuration of power in the international system has resulted in the proliferation of new centres of power, and the revolution in information and communication technologies has had a major role to play in this. Africa has remained the only region in the world lagging behind the advancement of information and communication technology that is increasingly turning the world into a global village. We at the OAU realize that we are also behind in infrastructure and we need to establish specific measures in collaboration with UNESCO to address this gap. We need to take more seriously the recommendations of the Geneva meeting on information technology and we need to harness information technology for development. I wish to pay special tribute to the President of Mali for his contribution.

I also wish to reflect on the issue of education. We are concerned with the declining education standards and the inability of our member states to address this particular issue. Education is indeed, the pillar of development and without it a nation cannot move forward in its developmental activities. We need to focus on what to do to arrest the situation and improve on the educational standards in Africa.

On our part, the bi-annual Session of the OAU Council of Ministers, and the Summit of Heads of State and Government and various international fora have provided opportunities to the OAU General Secretariat to galvanize the efforts of member states towards fulfilling their commitments.

As you are aware, the Yaounde Summit declared 1997-2006 as the Decade of Education in Africa. Indeed, the endorsement by the Heads of State for convening a conference of Ministers of Education to launch the Education Decade and formulate an appropriate programme underscore the importance of the decade. We need to plan very carefully to ensure effective implementation of the activities under the decade. I have no doubt that the OAU/UNESCO Joint Commission has made recommendations on how the two Secretariats could collaborate in this regard. The OAU would benefit from UNESCO's experience and intellectual input in all aspects of implementation.

Let me also make a few remarks on the issue of the culture of peace. First, I should like to take this opportunity to most sincerely thank UNESCO for providing us with a Consultant to help the OAU to define its activities in the promotion of culture of peace and tolerance in Africa.

Considering the scourge of conflicts in Africa, time has come when Africa must take the issue of culture of peace more seriously. As you all know ethnic rivalry in the continent has resulted in protracted conflicts in which many lives have been lost and property destroyed. We need to put in place measures to inculcate the culture of peace and tolerance. Beyond dialogue we should be able to play a more pro-active role in promoting the culture of peace. I hope that the OAU will take advantage of the experience of the Consultant offered by UNESCO in this field.

The Treaty establishing the African Economic Community has already come into force and the first meeting of ECOSOC was held in Abidjan. It is important for the Joint OAU/UNESCO Commission to explore ways and means to promote the aspirations of the Treaty.

Economic cooperation and integration is an issue of major concern to the OAU and it has been accorded a high priority. I am convinced the Joint Commission can play its role based on what it considers to be its comparative advantage in the field of cooperation and integration in Africa.

The Women Conference in Beijing and in Dakar made a number of far-reaching recommendations that need to be implemented with a clear vision and vigour. I am encouraged by UNESCO for taking the

lead in this area through the appointment of three prominent personalities to assist in elaborating specific programmes in this field.

We in the OAU will work closely with UNESCO and we invite the group of the Eminent Women Personalities appointed by UNESCO to give us their views on how best the OAU can carry forward more effectively, the Women Agenda and the issue of Gender Balance.

Another important issue raised concerned our joint cooperation in the field of culture of peace, good governance and the diffusion of democratic principles in Africa. All initiatives should enable the actors concerned, particularly political parties, NGOs and the civil society in general to express themselves freely. That is indispensable if we want to define together a code of conduct valid for the management of African affairs which would be endorsed by the actors concerned. All the protagonists of the political scene should arrive at considering victory or defeat in elections as a normal culmination. In that connection, the whole civil society in general and the political parties in particular need to inculcate tolerance. Tolerance in defeat as well as in victory. Contrary to what some think in the West, democracy in one African country is not measured only by the defeat of the incumbent government. On the other hand, the argument that makes democracy a western value

may be disputed. In truth, it is a universal value whose application can vary from one context, one period or one country to another just like the relations between ethnic groups may vary from one country to another in the same region.

While some concerns of the youth were covered under education, a number of special concerns also called for specific action. What was pointed out included matters requiring the physical and mental development of the youth, the contribution of the youth to national development, measures to nurture their curiosity and creativity and to increase their contribution to national development efforts in their respective countries, and to avoid drug abuse. As this is the information age, the UNESCO was invited to help upgrade the information and communication sector of the OAU, by supporting the Secretary General's initiative in establishing a proposed OAU/UN Inter-Agency Centre for Information Exchange which is meant to provide an up-to-date Multi-Media Information Technology for effective liaison between the OAU General Secretariat, Member States and the International Community at large.

As raised during the deliberations, the financial problems of the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) are very well known to you. We appreciate that the UNESCO has been keenly involved in PANA's recovery plan which has been on the drawing board for the past four

years. It is, therefore, our hope that concerted efforts will be made by OAU, UNESCO and all those concerned to enhance the success of this recovery plan.

Finally, let me make one short remark on the modality of work of the Joint Commission. As I said earlier, I was encouraged by the efficiency with which you addressed the issues on the Agenda. I think we could achieve more with some strategic planning.

The Joint Commission should not be an omnibus Commission. We cannot do everything we want to do. We have limited resources, both human and financial. I think we should prioritize the issues before the Commission. We look on issues that we can achieve tangible and concrete results. Our constituencies want to see action and face the impact of our deliberations. Our people will not take us seriously if we do not produce results or prescribe solutions to their problems.