



ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**Remarks by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim
Secretary General of the
Organisation of African Unity**

**Inter-Agency Workshop on Documented
Best Practices of Women in Peace Building
and
Non-Violent Means of Conflict Resolution**

24-26 November 1997

**Addis Ababa, 26 November 1997
Closing Session**

Mme Ruth Perry, Former Head of State of Liberia,

Mme Gertrude Mongella, Former Secretary
General of the Fourth World Conference on Women,

Mr. Henrik Olesen, Resident Representative a.i.,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you for the closing session of your Workshop and I regret that I have not been able to be with you from the beginning of your meeting. I am informed that you had rich and lively discussions during the last three days. Her Excellency Specioza KAZIBWE, Vice President of Uganda, whom I was pleased to meet prior to her departure from Addis Ababa informed me that a number of concerns had been raised. I did my best to address the legitimate concerns she had brought to my attention. In a telephone conversation we had this morning when she called me from Kampala to discuss other issues, I realized that our discussions yesterday had gone a long way in meeting her concerns.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Organising Committee for providing a fine example of inter-agency collaboration and for inviting me to address this closing session. Indeed, I am always pleased to attend a meeting devoted to the role of women which is a critical issue for our continent and which constitutes an area of particular concern for our Organisation.

It might not be sufficiently known, we might not have been making enough publicity about it, but it is a fact that, over the last years, we, at the OAU, have been according to the issue a great level of priority. I am personally committed to the objectives of the enhancement of the role and contribution of women in socio-economic and political endeavours in our continent. I have seized every opportunity to promote the role of women and to support initiatives aimed at advancing this important cause. It is in that spirit, that the OAU has strongly supported and that I have personally

attended, the first Summit of African First Ladies held in Abuja, Nigeria last year at the invitation of Mrs. ABACHA. Beyond the involvement of First Ladies, we saw in the initiative a genuine effort by concerned African women to promote the cause of women in the continent.

It was also within that context that the OAU had encouraged and actually financed a mission by twenty women who observed the elections in Liberia. This was a modest but, indeed, symbolic contribution on the part of the OAU. In the same vein, the OAU will be supporting a peace mission led by *Femmes, Africa, Solidarité* which is expected to proceed to Burundi next month. This is a new area where the OAU is striving to get more involved and is committed to do more to ensure the much needed contribution of women to peace efforts in the continent.

In this regard, the Secretariat has been working towards the establishment of the African Women's Committee for

Peace called for in the 1993 Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace. The Committee is intended to serve as a framework to facilitate the participation of women in “Institutions and Mechanisms created by the OAU for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and in all other Policy Organs and Sectoral Fora of ECA and OAU”. The creation of this Committee was endorsed by the OAU Summit in 1995. It was given further impetus by the recommendations of the Johannesburg Ad-Hoc Expert Group Meeting and the Kigali Conference on Peace, Gender and Development.

I am pleased to inform you that additional progress has now been made. Indeed, at the Harare Summit the issue of the Committee was raised and the Secretariat was requested to look into the ways and means of establishing the Committee. Since then, the Secretariat has been working on this important task. So far, we have received communications only from some Member States proposing candidates to serve on the

Committee. We are still expecting proposals from other Member States to allow the Secretariat to finalise the composition of the Committee.

Within the Secretariat, I wish to reiterate before the distinguished participants to this Workshop that it has been a matter of policy and of personal concern to me to ensure that women are equitably represented in the executive body of our Continental Organisation. For instance, in recent years, one of the guiding principles has been to give priority in the recruitment process to female candidates among candidates of equal competence and experience. In a particular case, I have made use of my discretionary authority to ensure that a competent female candidate is recruited despite the fact that her country was over-represented and had exceeded its quota within the General Secretariat. But we have a problem: invariably, candidates proposed by Member States for recruitment are predominantly men. This situation is unsatisfactory and needs to be redressed by our Member

States. This is one area where committed and concerned women should involve themselves and sensitise their respective governments to the importance of submitting suitable candidatures of female applicants to vacant posts at the General Secretariat.

We have also always made it a point to give preference to female staff members for promotion within the General Secretariat. Furthermore, and as a concrete demonstration of this commitment, I have, some years ago, appointed a woman as the Director of Administration and Conferences in charge of the management of the human resources of the General Secretariat. This, to my knowledge, was the first time in the history of our Organisation that a woman has held such an important and sensitive position.

Regarding the Women Unit, it is a fact that it has, so far, not been able to meet all our expectations. This has to do with the status and with its human and financial resources. I want

to assure you that this problem has been a source of constant preoccupation to us at the Secretariat. Indeed, despite the fact that we consider the establishment of the Unit within the General Secretariat, some years ago, as an important breakthrough in our endeavours towards promoting the role of women in the continent, delivery of the Unit is yet to be improved upon. That is why I have been recently consulting on the need to enhance the level of the Unit within the structures of the General Secretariat so as to be able to attract prominent women of high calibre and with relevant experience to provide leadership to the Unit. I am confident that my proposal on the upgrading of the Unit will be favourably considered by the Policy Organs of our Organisation as we are presently considering the restructuring of the General Secretariat.

But allow me to stress here the fact that the role of women with the General Secretariat is, to some extent, reflective of the situation of women in our individual

countries. That is why I believe that our Member States should be encouraged to include women in their delegations at the various OAU meetings so as to ensure that women concerns are given appropriate consideration within the OAU Policy Organs at all levels.

In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to African women for their dedication and commitment in defense of women concerns in our continent. I wish to commend them for their courage and relentless efforts in their struggle for peace in their respective communities and countries and at the service of peace in the continent. In this regard, I wish to pay special tribute to Mme Ruth Perry, the former Head of State of Liberia for her immense contribution to peace and national reconciliation in her country. Mme President, you exemplify the critical role we all expect from concerned African women in strengthening further peace, security and stability in our continent. I wish to put on record my profound appreciation for your important contribution.

Finally, I would like to urge the participants to this Workshop to consider my presence here, at their closing session, as a further recognition of the need to build a partnership between the OAU and all peace-loving women at the grass-roots level and from the civil society. I wish to reiterate OAU's full disposition in that respect. I, therefore, look forward to increased collaboration and wish to assure you all that, as Secretary General of the OAU, my door is open to you at all times. I remain a committed African to the advancement of the role of women because I strongly believe that this is in the best interest of our continent and its peoples.