

**FROM OAU TO THE AFRICAN UNION
PUBLIC LECTURE UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
ECONOMIC SOCIETY OF TANZANIA**

BY

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At the

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Mr. Chairman

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank the Economic Society of Tanzania for organizing this unprecedented forum addressing an issue of significant importance not only to the people of our country but also to the people of Africa as a whole, particularly in our quest to determine and shape a collective destiny.

The presence of all of you here, is a source of encouragement. It is a manifestation of the interest prevailing in the Continent on this important undertaking of fostering closer unity and solidarity among the African people. I feel honoured for being associated with this event and for being invited to share with you some of my

reflections on the process that I have been privileged to participate closely in its initiation and towards its launching.

To some extent my task is facilitated this afternoon by the fact that - for the people of Tanzania, and I believe also for our brothers and sisters who have joined us in our country, the phenomenon of unity is not simply an imagination or abstraction. The people of this country have enjoyed the virtues of unity from the community to the national level. They have taken pride in preserving and reaping the dividends of a living example of a full political union between two independent states. At the same time, they are also aware of the threats and dangers of tampering with that unity as well as the challenges of its consolidation. I therefore take comfort that I am speaking to an experienced audience on this subject.

The issue that I have been asked to reflect upon is the change, from the Organization of African Unity to the African Union. On the face of it, the subject appears to be largely institutional. Indeed, a picture that immediately comes to mind in addressing this topic is the transformation from the current framework of the OAU, with its structures and programmes, to a different entity called the AU, the African Union. Seen from this perspective, one is tempted to simply make comparisons and assess relative efficacies.

Fortunately, the essence of the process of change from the OAU to the AU is much deeper and more profound. It refers to the desires, the aspirations, the endeavours and vision of the African people about their collective destiny. The issue that has brought us here this afternoon, therefore, is not only about an organizational framework. Rather, and more pertinently, it is about the

dynamic of realizing a collective ideal – the ideal of African Unity.

It is this conviction that has been the moving spirit of our people. It is the intrinsic quest for unity that has revitalized us when our humanity has been questioned and our vulnerability accentuated. It constitutes the linkage of our collective past and the bonding of our common future. It is the state of being African that underlies the core of our identity. This is the essence of the change from the OAU to the AU. Indeed, it transcends structures and institutions.

This awareness and the quest for Continental unity are not born of yesterday. In fact, it was the very sense of a shared predicament that precipitated the emergence of the Pan-Africanist Movement as far back as more than a century ago. Initially, it evolved as a backlash against

slavery and its aftermaths, championed by Africans in the diaspora. These included people like Henry Sylvester William, W. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, and Cyril James. Leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, Wallace Johnson, Nnamdi Azikiwe, our own Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Leopald Senghor, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Felix Houphet-Boigny, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Ben Bella, Mohamed V and Haile Seilasie and many others later joined the movement and re-anchored it back into the Continent.

Later, Pan-Africanism became an expression of resistance, an aspiration for peace and freedom, an end to foreign exploitation, a quest for unity and solidarity among the African people. If, at the beginning, to use the words of Henry Sylvester Williams, the organizer of the first Pan-African Congress that was convened in July 1900, in London, the movement was intended, "to bringing into

closer touch with each other the peoples of African descent throughout the world"; by the end of the 1950s, Pan-Africanism had become a weapon for liberation and self-emancipation of the subjugated people of this Continent. It had generated a propulsion for carving out a destiny of choice.

Thus, by the end of the 1950s, Pan-Africanism was not merely an inspiring idea, or simply a sentimental desire. It had become a force to reckon with; which was translating itself into action and being applied to the concrete challenges facing the people of this Continent.

The numerous conferences and groupings that preceded the formation of the OAU were a demonstration of an endeavour to concretize that aspiration for unity and to promote its synergy with the struggles for independence. These include: the formation of groupings

such as PAFMECA that later grew into PAFMECSA, the convening of the All African People's Conferences under the initiative of President Kwame Nkrumah, the divergent positions taken on the modality of the way forward between the Casablanca Group and the Monrovia Group; and even the bold attempt made by Presidents Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sekou Toure of Guinea, and ^{Modibo} Keita of Mali to form a union of their countries which they perceived to be the nucleus of a wider "Union of Independent States of Africa" to which Member States would surrender portions of their national sovereignty 'in the full interest of the African community'.

The initial proliferation of these groups was partly a demonstration of the urgency and commitment with which the ideal of Pan-Africanism was taken. Almost every African country felt the need to start forming the basis for the wider framework of African integration. At the same

time, the major groupings, such as the Casablanca Group, and the Brazzaville one, that later became the Monrovia Group, were prompted by divergences on how to approach the whole question of African Unity.

A fundamental question that African Leaders had to grapple with at that time was – what kind of union does Africa really desire? Should it be a total and full framework of integration as advocated by some of the members of the Casablanca group or, as the Monrovia group perceived it, it should:

“....not [be a] political integration of sovereign African States, but unity of aspiration and of action considered from the point of view of African social solidarity and political identity.”

The positions taken on this fundamental question had a bearing on the disposition to cede elements of national sovereignty towards the union, and it also had implications on the pace and framework of integration.

As some of you may have already sensed, it behooves us to pay particular attention to the substance of this question, because, once again, it is confronting us at this very juncture as we move towards the African Union. I shall have more to say on this issue later.

The signing of the Charter forming the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 25 May 1963 after passionate and profound deliberations, signified a resolution of these differences. In the end, the option taken, and as Mwalimu Nyerere summed it up, considered a political union, as the ultimate objective of African Unity, was desirable and possible, but an appropriate framework

at that time was to pursue a step-by-step approach that avoided hasty action.

The significance of the event of 25th May 1963, lay not simply in creating a Pan-African Organization, which was in itself an important achievement. Even more profoundly, the significance was in the crystallization of the collective vision and aspirations of the African People. On that historic day, African leaders articulated through the Charter of the OAU not only a vision of the Africa that the people of this Continent desire to see evolving, but also the means by which that objective can be realized.

That moment was indeed a point of reckoning for our Continent. It demonstrated the resilience of our people - in that after centuries of subjugation, humiliation and of being divided through the twin historical evils of slavery

and colonialism - they could still remain adamant in their quest for carving a destiny of unity and solidarity.

The conscience of Africa as manifested in the event of May 25th, 1963, underlined the centrality of uniting the people of this Continent. It was a recognition of the fact that the imperative of building a strong, united Continent where the people shared a common African identity compelled us to avoid the inherited path of fragmentation and separation. In the words of the OAU Charter, there was "a common determination to promote understanding among our peoples and cooperation among our states in response to the aspirations for brotherhood and solidarity, in a larger unity transcending ethnic and national differences."

The birth of the OAU also underlined the legitimate aspiration of African people to achieve freedom, equality,

justice and dignity. These central values, articulated in 1963, were not merely slogans deriving from an imitation of some western constitutions. Rather, these were the words of a people that have come out of centuries of struggle against foreign domination. And the fact that these values were being enshrined once again into the Charter of an institution of independent states was a reaffirmation of a commitment to work even harder for the realization of these cardinal values in the post-independence period. The Charter was not merely a founding legal instrument for an Inter-Governmental Organization, but a living statement intended to encapsulate the idea of a united Africa people.

It is almost 39 years since that momentous occasion. During that period, the OAU has achieved outstanding accomplishments in the political, economic and social

realms. At the same time, it has also revealed some shortcomings.

Quite remarkably, the Organization has survived the challenges of the last four decades and come out of it even more vibrant and stronger. All the 30 Member States who attended the founding conference on 25th May 1963 and the others who joined the Organization later have remained faithful and committed to its creed and vision. Only the Kingdom of Morocco opted to remove itself out of the Organization on a difference of principle.

During this period the Continent has gone through formidable trials and tribulations, ranging from severe economic crisis and marginalization, rampant conflicts and the attendant instability and insecurity, to the decimation of its people by the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Despite all these, the OAU is still with us, and it is now moving to higher

horizons. It has given us a means of galvanizing our collective interests and pursuing common aspirations.

Similarly, notwithstanding our diversity, an element that is sometimes artificially accentuated, the OAU has managed to promote and inculcate an African identity in all of us. Transcending our respective nationalities, cultural diversity, variation in languages, and physical differences, the bottom line is that we are all Africans, bonded by a shared destiny.

In 1963, Africa had only 32 countries that were politically independent. The rest were still under the tutelage of colonialism and apartheid, some of which was the most vicious modern history has ever witnessed. It was under the framework of the OAU and especially under the auspices of the OAU Liberation Committee whose Headquarters was right here in Dar es Salaam that

independent Africa was mobilized to obliterate the last vestiges of colonialism and apartheid and to usher-in a new independent Africa.

With the accomplishment of that historic mission, the OAU, working with other Regional Organizations such as the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank embarked on a reorientation of the Continental agenda towards the socio-economic development of the people of this Continent. The laying down of the principles of cooperation in the social and economic field, and specifically the creation of Regional Economic Communities and the signing of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community signify OAU's endeavour in surmounting the new challenges facing the Continent.

By the 1990s, after years of being anguished and standing indicted by the horror of escalating conflicts in our Continent, Africa, under the OAU, responded by collectively insisting that it is unacceptable for us to be perceived as a Continent prone to endemic violence, and where peace, security, stability and development are but a distant possibility. It was conceded from that point on, that peace, security, and stability are a collective responsibility of all Africans. It cannot be left to the idiosyncrasies of individual societies, in the name of national sovereignty.

The creation of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Cairo in 1993 was thus an important achievement in our quest to ensure the well being of our people. It is encouraging to observe that Africans themselves are leading all the initiatives that are currently being undertaken to resolve conflicts in

Africa. And as we enter the new century, despite various hurdles to be overcome, there are positive developments in many of these conflict areas that signal prospects for peace.

I need to mention also that the OAU has seen the steady but definite contribution in the inculcation and strengthening of the culture of democracy and the respect of human rights. The rejection of unconstitutional changes of Government, the willingness of Member States to have their elections monitored, as well as the reproaches often made on violations of human rights are some of the gradual steps being taken to institutionalize these values.

Alongside all these laudable accomplishments, our Continental body, particularly in the recent past, has not succeeded to sufficiently involve the ordinary Africans in

its activities. Unlike the liberation struggle, of which every African vehemently identified with and engaged in action, the subsequent agenda of the OAU has not involved the African masses sufficiently.

This is a deficiency that has weakened the effectiveness of the Organization. By allowing it to become a preoccupation that predominantly concerns Heads of State and their Governments, the OAU lost a major component that would have reinvigorated its dynamism. Definitely, a closely involved civil society into the affairs of their Continental Organization would have enhanced its accountability, revitalized its role, and reinforced its impact in the Continent.

Another shortcoming has been the inability to deal decisively with conflicts that have caused havoc and destruction in the Continent. There are generations in this

Continent that are growing up without knowing what peace means. The conflict in the Sudan is almost as old as the OAU itself, Angola has only tested a very brief spell of peace during the last 40 years. Generally, at every point in time there is a major conflagration in the Continent, many of which can be avoided.

We all stood indicted for the genocide in Rwanda, when 31 years after the creation of our Continental Organization we were still helpless in preventing the murder of hundreds of thousands of Rwandese women, men and children by their fellow citizens. It remains incomprehensible and a shattering experience for me to recall my meeting in Freetown at a camp of the amputees with ^a 3 months old baby girl called Maimuna whose two tiny limbs were hacked off with a machete by an a fellow Sierra Leonian who claimed he was fighting for a just cause in his country.

I can go on recounting these horrors; the list is endless – the conflict in the DRC, the war in Burundi, the crisis in Liberia, the unending more than a decade civil war in Somalia and the many others that are constantly recurring and those that are fuelling up. They all represent a phenomenon that ought not to be there because it seriously undermines the African cause.

All in all, the Organization of African Unity enters the 21st Century and the new millennium with great accomplishments and with some serious setbacks. However, the situation in the new era requires a new vigour and a new vitality. The international situation had changed and it calls for a different approach to harnessing opportunities and overcoming threats. A more vigorous collective momentum is required in order to thrive within the new configuration of global forces.

Inside the Continent, the socio-economic transformation that has been pursued has not translated itself into sustainable improvement for the welfare of our people. The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act were translated into the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Similarly, a number of Regional Economic Communities have been established in all parts of the Continent. However, the challenges facing the Continent are too enormous for the pace and impact of these initiatives.

It was these considerations that prompted African Leaders to pronounce the Sirte Declaration on the establishment of the African Union on the 9th of September 1999. Our Leaders realized that the OAU has to be transformed in order to cope with these challenges.

In institutional terms, the operationalization of that decision involved the preparation of a legal instrument that is acceptable to all the Member States. This involved clearly articulating objectives and principles of the Organization; delineating its authority, functions, structures and regulations, all of which entailed addressing the fundamental question of what kind of union is being desired. This, indeed, provoked a debate that is reminiscent of the challenging discourse preceding the formation of the OAU.

There were those who took the position that time is ripe for establishing a United States of Africa in which we vest our collective sovereignty to a higher body of the Union and remove the boundaries imposed by colonialism and all the attendant structures. And, just as before, there were others who advocated for a more gradual approach, while preserving the boundaries and national sovereignty.

The Constitutive Act that was finally adopted at the Lome Summit in July 2000 represents the most common denominator between those two positions, while at the same time allowing for the ultimate realization of the highest form of integration.

Only 9 months after its adoption, all the 53 Member States had signed the Act and only a few ratifications were remaining to attain the required instruments for the Constitutive Act to enter into force. It is in recognizing the reality of this enthusiasm and commitment that on the 2nd of March 2001, at the Extra-Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly held in Sirte, Libya, African Leaders proclaimed the establishment of the African Union pending the fulfillment of the legal requirements.

Indeed, on the 26th of May 2001, one month after the deposit of the 36th instrument of ratification by the Republic of Nigeria, the Constitutive Act of the African Union formally entered into force. This event marked an impressive historical record for any instrument to become legally effective in less than one year since its adoption. To-date, 47 out of the 53 Member States of the OAU have already ratified the Act.

Bearing in mind the magnitude of the commitment that is embedded in the Constitutive Act, the rapidity of its signing and ratification is an indication of the urgency and vital importance attached to the decision of establishing the African Union. During its last session held in Lusaka in July 2001, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government agreed on a one-year transition period for undertaking the essential preparation for the launching of the African Union. It is expected, that the new Organization shall be

launched within the next few months when the Assembly reconvenes in Durban, South Africa.

The Constitutive Act of the African Union is essentially a merger of the OAU Charter and the Abuja Treaty and incorporates the spirit of creating a revitalized institution. Its principles and objectives underline a broadening of the collective area of activities in all of the socio-economic and political domains. The Act recognizes the existing boundaries of Member States and calls for the sovereign equality and interdependence among the Member States of the Union.

A total of 17 Organs are provided for in the Constitutive Act, and apart from the decision making and managerial organs, these also include a Pan-African Parliament, a Court of Justice, and also Financial

Institutions such as the African Central Bank, The African Monetary Fund, and the African Investment Bank.

At the beginning, the African Union is neither a federation nor a confederation. A similarity is sometimes drawn between the African Union and the European Union, particularly in terms of the evolution of a supranational body which is bestowed with authority that has been ceded by Member States. However, the African Union, at this stage does not possess a supranational power prevailing over and above the national governments.

While the Constitutive Act replaces the OAU Charter, it retains the Abuja Treaty though takes precedence over and supersedes any of its inconsistent or contrary provisions.

The Act incorporates the new political ethos that is evolving in the Continent. It emphasizes the respect for democratic principles, human rights, rule of law, and good governance. It condemns and rejects unconstitutional changes of governments. It underscores the promotion of gender equality as well as that of social justice so as to ensure balanced economic development. Indeed the desired Union is to be a "community of people" and therefore the Constitutive Act calls for the participation of the African peoples in the activities of the Union.

The African Union, in this respect, is neither a completely new Organization nor is it simply a change of name and designation. It builds from the accomplishments of the OAU and creates an elevated, dynamic and engaging framework for fostering closer unity and solidarity among the African people.

It launches the Continental body into a high operational gear through the consolidation of Regional Economic Communities and also launching activity oriented programmes such as the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the Conference on Security, Stability, and Development Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA)

The new framework accentuates the Continental space vis-à-vis the national space. The competence of the African Union is much broader and the institutional structures that have been provided for – establish a dynamic framework for providing vision, leadership and decision-making; for ensuring technical oversight and guidance; and for maintaining effective engagement and implementation in all spheres of the Continent's development.

And more importantly, the African Union brings to the fore the role of the people of this Continent in the shaping of their destiny. The provision for the Pan-African Parliament; as well as the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council in the Constitutive Act, when they are fully operationalized, is intended to enhance the voice of the people in the affairs of the Union.

At this stage, we are at the formative stage of this laudable enterprise. The commitment is high and the determination is strong. However, we have also to be cognizant of the challenges facing us in realizing this noble aspiration. Indeed, the most critical is the anchoring of the whole project within the initiatives and everyday activities and interests of the African people.

The African Union is not simply an undertaking of Heads of State and Government. Neither is it only a

responsibility of the OAU Secretariat of those of the Regional Economic Communities. The project involves all of us as a collective – whether it is the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture; the Confederation of Labour; Farmers Cooperatives; Youth, Women and Intellectual Organizations – all of us are stakeholders in this undertaking, and therefore we need to take ownership and engage ourselves in strategies of promoting closer interaction for our common good.

An essential prerequisite in fostering this collective engagement is the need to develop some common values pertaining to our unity and to share some core principles relating to our socio-political and economic life. Indeed, it may sound like clichés, but the need to have a collective respect on the values of good governance, human rights, the rule of law, and gender equality, cannot be overemphasized. The gist of these principles is that each of

us is an integral and equal member of society and is fully entitled to the same space and role that everyone else gets in shaping the destinies of our respective societies. Any fundamental divergence on this core principle within and between African societies can constitute a basis for severely eroding the unity that we are aspiring for.

In the same regard, the maintenance and consolidation of peace and human security, as well as the laying down of a foundation for stability, are important prerequisites in realizing the ideal of unity. In fact, conflict is the very antithesis of unity. It tears down mutual affinity among people. It blemishes a shared vision of the future; it destroys energies and devastates resources. Above all it bleeds our people.

The process of building a shared vision should also involve overcoming the apprehensions and concerns

associated with the process of integration. These include fearing the diminution of sovereignty, loss of revenue resulting from the removal of trade barriers, increased competition, and even getting entangled into unwanted social and political problems.

Indeed, some of these concerns are genuine, and they cannot be simply dismissed. However, they are not insurmountable. Experience of other countries, including that of the most developed and powerful, offers assurance that the long term benefits of cooperation and integration, far outweigh the short term losses. In the same regard, in this era of globalization, the functionality of sovereignty among the weak, impoverished and fragmented countries of Africa can only be enhanced through cooperation and unity.

It is important to underline that all these perceptions of hesitation and concerns cannot be overcome by mere rhetorical conviction. Concrete programmes have to be developed which demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and integration at all levels. To be meaningful African unity has to manifest itself as a better life for the African people and it has to foster a closer interaction and engagement among them.

A major challenge that has to be confronted is the institutional operationalization of this noble ideal. The Abuja Treaty had designated the Regional Economic Communities to be the building blocs of African integration. The Sirte Declaration calls for the acceleration of the implementation of the Abuja Treaty. However, The vision of constructing the AEC was predicated on the assumption that Africa would go through the progressive stages of establishing, first, a preferential or free trade

area to be followed by the creation of a customs union, an economic common market, an economic community, and, as the ultimate stage, a political union.

The decision to establish the African Union immediately was a deliberate attempt to circumvent the slow, incremental process envisaged in Article 6 of the Abuja Treaty, which was scheduled to cover a transitional period not exceeding thirty-four years!

The African Union, as presently envisaged, is not the logical outcome of the process that had been envisaged in the Abuja Treaty, which is predicated on the stage-by-stage implementation process of classical or conventional integration theory. The challenge is how to determine the logic of this accelerated process of integration in order to appropriately sequence the institutional structure?

The logic of integration has also a bearing in terms of developing the institutional linkages between the Regional Economic Communities and the African Union on the one hand, and the dynamic of sub-regional integration which seems to be quite an advanced pace and that of the Continental level.

In conclusion let me once again stress that, the change from the OAU to the African Union is not merely one of name and designation. Indeed, the Union that we are aspiring to create is an elevated framework of cooperation and integration aiming at promoting closer unity among African people.

The framework is made up of institutions (with its objectives, values, norms and competences) as well as with programmes of action for realizing our ideals.

The decision to undertake a transformation of the OAU into the African Union is intended to re-dynamize the institutions as well as consolidate and accelerate the programmes of action so as to cope with the existing challenges through our collective efforts.

It is intended to providing institutions that can match with the challenges, both within the Continent and in the broader context of the globalizing world, and to perform the requisite task of creating a community of people in Africa.

The enterprise presents opportunities, but it also engenders responsibilities as well as the need for an ardent commitment on the part of our Governments and our people. Primarily, we need to work towards the determination of the degree to which we should pool our

separate entities and resources so as to create a better future for the people of this Continent.

This is large project, but it has to be undertaken and we have to accomplish it. We should not fail. We cannot afford to fail.

I Thank You