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ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

**STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE 5TH EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF
STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

*1 march 2001
sirte, libya*

**SIRTE, LIBYA,
1 MARCH 2001.**

**Your Excellency, Gnassingbe Eyadema
President of the Republic of Togo
The Current Chairman of Our Organization,**

**Your Excellency, Brother Muammar Ghaddafi
Leader of the Al-Fatah Revolution and
Our Gracious Host,**

Your Majesty,

**Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,**

Distinguished Guests,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to add my voice in welcoming you to the 5th Extra-Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The mere fact that African leaders are meeting in an Extra-ordinary Session of the Assembly is in itself a demonstration of the sense of urgency, unity of purpose and firm cohesiveness with which the issue of Africa's unity and integration is being addressed. I wish to salute and pay tribute to them for the dedication and seriousness they have demonstrated in pursuing the collective agenda of our Continent. I should like also in this regard to express gratitude and appreciation to the Brother Leader Muammar Ghaddafi and the People of Libya for, once again, reaffirming to us with

their characteristic affection and hospitality, that their country is our home. We thank them sincerely.

We have come back to this fast-growing and beautiful city of Sirte, heeding a call. This time, it is not a call from one leader among you. It is not a call arising from an emergency or a fortuitous event. We are gathered here to honour a collective commitment that you made one and half years ago. A commitment that is driven by the hopes and aspirations of the African people, inspired by our abiding faith in our continent as well as the great vision of the Founding Fathers of our Continental Organization, and reaffirmed by your own resolve enunciated here in the historic declaration that you adopted on 9.9.99.

On that day, you, the Leaders of this Continent, at the invitation of your Brother, Colonel Muammar Ghaddafi, met here in Sirte for two days to deliberate on the future of the Continent and, more specifically, to discuss on ways to enhance our unity, cohesion and solidarity. After due deliberations, you solemnly proclaimed the Sirte Declaration, which, among other things, called for the establishment of the African Union and the acceleration of the process of implementing the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. This included ensuring the speedy establishment of all the institutions provided for in the Abuja Treaty, particularly the Pan-African Parliament.

The Sirte Declaration evoked a variety of reactions ranging from great expectation and hope, to criticism and, even on some occasions, cynicism and ridicule. To the African peoples and to the friends of this Continent, the Declaration symbolized an earnest and genuine attempt at a new beginning in the quest for greater unity and cohesion in our continent. The critics considered it as an unachievable dream, and the cynics and detractors portrayed the Sirte Declaration as inconsequential. However, one thing is clear: no one ignored what transpired in Sirte, and as time went by, more and more recognized the historic nature of that decision and the potential that it represents for the African Continent.

In Lome last July, you gave practical meaning to the Sirte Declaration by adopting unanimously the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Since then, efforts have been made to live up to the calendar as stipulated in Sirte in terms of signing and ratification. As you are aware, with respect to signing, there has been an overwhelming response. However, the process of ratification has moved a little slower. This is understandable, given the different national requirements regarding ratification. However, in the last few weeks and as we reconvene for this Summit, the process has been accelerated.

It is important to stress, however, that the issue of the African Union has gained currency and assumed primacy in the Continental agenda. It has become an important reference point in all deliberations concerning our Continent. It has also become a rallying point in the ongoing efforts to mobilize the African people in forging closer unity. Indeed, this is important because the Union that we intend to establish is, first and foremost, aimed at serving African peoples in their various domains. It is quite natural that the people should have a stake in it.

The challenge before this Extra-Ordinary Session is, therefore, how to translate into concrete action the solemn decisions you took both here in Sirte in September 1999 and in Lome less than a year later. Put succinctly, how do we go about establishing an African Union and creating the necessary related institutions without undue delay, but also taking into account our respective situations. This is a challenge that, once again, calls for our collective action to overcome. It is a responsibility which, you, our Leaders, are called upon to fulfill not only in the interest of the present generation but also for generations yet unborn.

I am happy to note that significant progress has been achieved on for the establishment of the Pan-African Parliament. Indeed, this process has unleashed a new dynamism, particularly by the active involvement of African parliamentarians in the

preparatory process. As elected representatives of the People, their participation in conceiving the creation of this important institution brought closer to the people of this Continent not only the ownership of the African Parliament, but equally important the whole movement towards the African Union.

We have come a long way to reach where we are. Our vision is clear, our commitment is firm, and I am confident that we have galvanized sufficient momentum to take the ultimate step. As we approach our destination, and at this critical juncture, there is an imperative necessity of considering the challenges and tasks that lie ahead in establishing the Union.

The Constitutive Act approved in Lome provides some guidelines in handling the process of changing into the Union and the transitional continuity of existing institutions. Perhaps, there may be a need for a consideration of some of the pertinent implications of this dynamic and the critical decisions that have to be made so as to ensure that the African Union is launched smoothly and on a sound foundation.

There is a new dawn emerging in Africa. Today, once again, African leaders have reconverged here in Sirte. In memory of the African heroes who fought gallantly to restore our dignity and freedom; in the name of the peoples of this Continent who are faced today with a multiplicity of challenges and whose

survival and progress depend on our collective strength; indeed, and for a better tomorrow for all us now, and for those yet unborn, let us seize this precious historic opportunity by giving a new impetus to our quest for greater and a stronger unity.

I thank you.