



Organization of African Unity

**FIFTY-EIGHTH ORDINARY SESSION OF
THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**Statement of the Secretary General,
H.E. Salim Ahmed Salim**

Cairo, Egypt

June 21, 1993

**Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to join the authorities of the host Government in extending to you all a very warm and hearty welcome to Cairo and to Egypt. I am sure, I shall be echoing your collective sentiment if I thank the Egyptian Government for the excellent preparations made and the facilities which have been placed at our disposal. This should certainly provide a propitious atmosphere in which this Council can proceed with its work, expeditiously.

Let me at the same time, extend my warm congratulations to H.E. Amre Moussa, for his election to the Chair. In the same vein, I congratulate other members of the Bureau for their unanimous election; and extend to them our fullest cooperation. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to H.E. Paul Ssemogerere, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uganda, the outgoing Chairman of the Council for the very able manner in which he presided over the deliberations of the Council, and for the cooperation and support he extended to me and to the General Secretariat.

In addition, allow me to perform a pleasant duty to welcome in our midst, H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Ahmed Sherifo, the Foreign Minister of the new State of Eritrea and to express to him and his delegation, my full disposition and that of the General Secretariat to work closely with his country in the furtherance of the principles and objectives of our Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

My Introduction to the Report of the Secretary General has already been circulated to Your Excellencies in Document CM/1765(LVIII) Part I. It contains the highlights of the issues which I believe deserve the particular attention of the Council. In my statement, therefore, I wish to confine myself to sharing with Your Excellencies some of my thoughts concerning the challenges before us and the role of our Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

Twenty nine years ago, the First Summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity met in this historic city of Cairo. I had the rare opportunity and honour to be present at that Summit meeting. As a young man, literally undergoing initiation in diplomacy as the Ambassador of the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to the Arab Republic of Egypt, it was a thrilling but at the same time, a humbling experience. It was thrilling because, Africa, just emerging from colonialism, was full of hope. The great leaders of Africa of the time and founding fathers of the Organization, met in an atmosphere of great expectation and of challenge but they remained undaunted by the magnitude of the challenge which lay ahead. They began to chart the course for the Organization and for the Continent. They saw in the Organization they had founded, the embodiment of the collective wishes and expectations of the people of the Continent. At that, their first Summit, the leaders sought to give practical expression to the Charter of the Organization.

I was humbled not only by the presence of those great leaders but even young and inexperienced as I were at the time, by the enormity of the tasks which Africa was embarking on. I was at the same time inspired by the determination of those leaders to steer the Continent, to a new course of freedom and justice, of peace and development. It is that determination, the spirit to persevere, which proved decisive in the formative years of the Organization which followed that first historic Summit in this city. Today, many of us look back at it to renew our faith in Africa, to draw fresh inspiration from the zeal, the tenacity and the commitment of the leaders of the time to the building of a free and prosperous Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

Much has changed in the last twenty nine years. Much has been achieved and many lessons learnt. What has remained unchanged, however, is the commitment of Egypt to Africa and the unfailing role it has played in defence of the interests of the Continent. Egypt was then a centre of liberation not only of Africa but the Arab world and beyond. Today Egypt continues to provide effective support to the movement of liberation and to the struggle for freedom and justice. As we meet therefore let us take inspiration not only from the determination of the first Summit meeting of the OAU, but also from the people of this ancient land whose belief in the worth of human being has placed them at the forefront in the battles against colonialism and racism and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

Mr. Chairman,

After thirty years of existence, the OAU has come of age. This Council meeting should provide us both an opportunity of assessment and of reflection. To look at where we are coming from, how things are, what we did right, what we did wrong, what we should do differently if at all and what we should not do. Obviously, Africa has made tremendous achievements. The OAU has made it possible for Africa to think and act as one. We have a common identity as Africans with an opinion and perspective of world view which is distinctly African. We are united as one, in purpose and action. As Africa through the OAU, we were able to bring a dimension of view to world politics which made serious attempt to steer clear of the ideological rivalries of the sixties, seventies and eighties. Africa played a key role in giving birth to the Non-Aligned Movement, in strengthening it and enabling it to emerge as a distinct positive force in international politics.

Africa, constituting nearly a third of the United Nations for a long time, contributed to the strengthening of that Organization; and giving it universality and consolidating its global legitimacy. By upholding the objectives and principles of the United Nations, opposing that which undermined them, African States were able to bring to the mainstream of diplomacy and international politics, many issues which affected the welfare of the majority developing countries of the world. Whether within the UN system or within the Group of 77 Africa acted as one in demanding that a new International Economic Order founded on equity and justice be established. Africa argued for greater

international action in tackling the issues of poverty, underdevelopment and debt. We fought for freedom, justice and liberation. Africa was able to do all this, to be effective, because it spoke as one, because it was united. Where we succeeded, it was where we were united. Where we failed, is where we lacked unity. It is that unity which has enabled the OAU to wither the storm, and survive the currents of the cold-war era. In a very real sense, the very survival of the OAU, much less its growth, in spite of so many odds, is testimony to that enduring commitment to unity which our countries and leaders have had all along.

Mr. Chairman,

Perhaps no where has unity proved more decidedly effective than in the question of decolonization. The founding fathers of our Organization, saw the freedom of their countries constrained and without deep meaning if other African countries and peoples remained in colonial bondage. They made decolonization an agenda to which they consecrated immense energy and resources. Today we see vividly the result of that labour. The ranks of independent African countries have swelled and the freedom frontiers have now been extended to the doors of Apartheid South Africa. If Africa has been able to make such gains in the field of decolonization and advancing the cause of justice it was again in large measure because it was united. That unity was instrumental in both coordinating Africa's strategy and action as well as in garnering international support. The combination of efforts

in turn enhanced the morale and capacity of the people directly fighting against colonialism and Apartheid to soldier on.

Mr. Chairman,

In South Africa, the situation remains volatile notwithstanding the progress made so far. Yes we have begun to see light at the other end of the tunnel but the journey across that tunnel is bound to be difficult indeed. We are encouraged that the negotiations within the multiparty framework has progressed sufficiently enough to set a date for the elections in April next year. But we know that the die-hard racists and other forces of the status quo will not give in easily. The cowardly assassination of Chris Hani was clear indication of the hurdles which the transition to a non-racial democratic and United South Africa is bound to face. As we move towards the preparations for the elections, I hope that Africa and the international community will not allow itself to lapse into euphoria that the end of Apartheid has come. We should instead heighten our vigilance to ensure that the Government of South Africa remains, unalterably committed to change, to see to it that the extreme elements are not allowed to undermine the process of transition and that the Liberation Movements are assisted in the resource-demanding tasks of preparing for the elections.

In Namibia, the OAU was able to play a meaningful and decisive role in helping SWAPO in the elections. We know how that support proved crucial in terms of giving SWAPO the means to compete against a well entrenched government with unlimited financial means. If it was difficult in Namibia, it is certainly bound to be much more so in South Africa. I therefore hope that this Council will consider seriously the ways and means in which Africa can, in practical terms, assist the Liberation Movements as they prepare themselves for the elections.

Mr. Chairman,

As we look forward to the end of Apartheid in South Africa, and the completion of the decolonization process, we must turn our attention to the many vexing problems which face our Continent.

The 1980s were particularly difficult years for our countries and continent. The far reaching effects of the economic crisis and its snowballing effect, became apparent then and most of our countries slid deeper into poverty and debt. The compounding effect it had to the ability of our countries to deliver basic services such as education, housing, sanitation and health to the people, was very severe indeed.

Of course, our economic weakness, deepened our dependence on external assistance and correspondingly constrained our ability to exercise our political options. Most of our countries saw the need to re seize the initiative - at least to begin the process of doing so. They plunged into the uncertain world of economic reform and structural adjustment with all the political and social risks it entailed. But we saw this as the only way of beginning on the road to economic recovery. Today our countries still persist in the implementation of the structural reform programmes in the firm conviction, that ultimately, they shall emerge in greater economic efficiency and development.

After the hesitation and uncertainties of the eighties, Africa is now clear about where it has come from, where it is, and most importantly, where it wants to go. Africa has a clear perspective of the direction it wants to take and what it will take to reach its destination of freedom, unity, peace and economic prosperity. Africa now has an agenda based on its perception of its own needs and priorities. There is now greater realization that economic recovery and development will come primarily from our own efforts even if we shall continue to ask for international solidarity and cooperation. Africa is determined to ensure that its efforts and resources are targeted towards the principal objective of stemming the slide of our countries into deeper poverty, of restoring growth and stimulating economic development. While our countries deploy these efforts individually at the national level, they realize that ultimately their true strength and viability lies in unity.

Economic integration within the African economic community remains the key to economic prosperity of Africa. The pursuit for economic integration through the building of an African Economic Community under the Abuja Treaty, is a common objective which we set for ourselves. It is motivated by the basic conviction that our countries, together, stand to benefit from continental integration. Our countries may be different, in size, population and wealth. Among ourselves, we may differentiate between those countries we think are rich and which are poor. But the truth is that all our countries are poor and far behind in development. Individually, no matter their relative comparison in wealth and strength, our countries are incapable of making any impact on the international system. But collectively, we can mount a united front which cannot be easily ignored by the rest of the world.

In Abuja in 1991, we firmed our collective efforts in agreeing to begin the process of building the African Economic Community. Today we have made progress but, progress is far from rekindling the sense of urgency and importance which accompanied the signature of the Abuja Treaty. The ratification process has admittedly been slow even giving allowance to the normal process of legislative and bureaucratic procedures which our respective governments have to fulfill. I therefore wish to reiterate my appeal to Member States to quicken their processes of ratifying the Treaty.

Cooperation, especially within the framework of large and diversified economic entities is no longer an option which Africa can choose to exercise or leave at will. It is not a favour which our countries do to each other. It is an imperative of Africa's collective survival as a continent and as a people. Today in Europe, in North and South America, in Asia and the Pacific, the trend is one of unity, of working together and trading with each other. Underlying this trend of creating bigger economic groupings, is the realization that the future belongs to the bigger and more diversified economic entities held together by shared economic interests and objectives. Certainly, Africa, the presently weakest economically, of all the regions, has greater need to come together, to work together.

Mr. Chairman,

Equally, after the uncertainties and hesitation of the 1980s, Africa is finally finding its new political direction. We see a new movement in the continent powered by a desire to change. Issues of political governance are assuming greater attention and providing another challenge of political management. What is healthy about this movement is that it encapsulates the continent's yearning to have a fresh look at matters of popular participation, human rights and political governance. Governments and people have by and large found common ground on which to address these issues and manage them. There may be errors committed. That is bound to happen as a natural process of adjusting to a new situation. But what is important is not that mistakes are made but that they are made in the genuine desire to make things right and that

we manifest the determination to learn from those mistakes and correct them. Our countries may be criticized that they are slow to democratize. While we indeed must question the premise of some of those criticisms, we should also not deliberately or by omission provide justification for them. This is why I am encouraged to note that the process of political transition is continuing and happy that the OAU General Secretariat is allowed to play a part in it, through the observation of elections.

Mr. Chairman,

We have rightly insisted and we should continue to insist that Africans more than any one else understand that change is coming and is bound to come to the Continent. What we want and must ensure is that change comes not for its own sake, but because it is good, it is needed and it is real. But for it to have good impact it must emanate from the will of the people and it must be managed, so that the exuberance attendant to it is, not allowed to undermine the very foundations of society. Yes change must come; but it must come through a process of transition which preserves peace and stability and promotes unity and national concord. Change which does not embody these principles can only lead to political polarization and division and will generate chaos. Whether in matters of democracy, human rights or any other, our countries also have the right to insist that, these tenets of politics must derive legitimacy from the society by drawing from its culture, traditions, customs, history and value systems. No society has built democracy purely, on the basis of imported values and value systems. Africa therefore must

continue insisting that the process of building democracy, must be bred and nurtured in the Continent. At the same time, we must continue to take the challenge of managing the political transition seriously. For ultimately if the political forces in our countries find common ground to work for common good, the process of managing transition will be greatly facilitated.

Mr. Chairman,

When I assumed office almost four years ago, I spoke of the need for Africa to fight the negative image it has erroneously earned as a continent impermeable to change and a place where conflicts and suffering are endemic. I also spoke of the need for Africa to re seize the initiative, to stand and fight for what is right and what it believes in. To do so, however, I saw need for Africa to begin on the task of addressing those specific problems and obstacles which stand in the way. For, in order for Africa to stand up, and be heard, it must restore its credibility as a continent which is capable of acting and to act effectively in its own interest.

Mr. Chairman,

No where has the credibility of our Continent suffered greater damage and been called into question more than in the area of conflicts. Our Continent has earned the dubious distinction of being the most prone to conflicts and in which human suffering has found unending prevalence. The result of these conflicts, either between or within our countries has been quite devastating in terms of the hate and suffering they

have engendered, the infrastructure and property they have destroyed as well as the immense human and material resources they have diverted from socio-economic development. The reseizing of the initiative of Africa therefore means, the taking of effective action to put an end to the hurt, the suffering and bleeding of the Continent. I am happy to note that in the course of the recent years, Africa through our Organization, has taken determined action to extricate itself from the limiting political circumstances and to begin on the road to effectively dealing with the scourge of conflicts in the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

The journey, begun with adoption by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 1990 in Addis Ababa of the Declaration on Fundamental Changes in the World and their implications for Africa, has now reached a critical stage. Before this Council is an item on the establishment, within the OAU, of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. A study on all the aspects relating to the Mechanism, including institutional and operational details as well as its financing done pursuant to the decision of the 28th Assembly of Heads of State and Government at its meeting in Dakar last year is also before the Council as Document CM/1767 (LVIII). The stage we have reached, represents real movement in the journey we began three years ago, and the sustained and broad-ranging consultations we have had across the Continent. Before this Council is also a Draft Declaration of the 29th Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the establishment, within the OAU of a Mechanism

for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in Africa. The Draft Declaration is a result of intensive, and extensive consultations which have been held and of the patient work of the African Ambassadors based at the OAU Headquarters in Addis Ababa. The Document embodies the broad consensus which evolved on the various aspects of the proposed Mechanism, and it embodies the collective will and determination of our countries to give themselves an effective instrument of dealing with conflicts and conflict situations in the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

This provides a new opening of hope that we can, as a Continent, come together and rally around a common cause. It is a determination in a real sense to empower ourselves, to give ourselves means with which to act and act decisively. This is what reseizing the initiative means. It is to provide leadership and to situate Africa, through the OAU at the Centre of all efforts at finding solutions to the conflicts in the Continent. The Mechanism we propose for ourselves, will give us that ability to provide leadership. I hope that we shall not miss this historic opportunity for the sake of ourselves and the generations to come.

Mr. Chairman,

The OAU, notwithstanding its limitations and constraints, has served Africa well. Today we celebrate its achievements and rededicate it to the challenges that lie ahead. At a time of expanding responsibilities however, we must look into how we can back-up the Organization with added resources. It is not possible to expect the OAU to perform and do so well, when it is starved of the means to do so. This is a perennial problem to which I have repeatedly addressed myself. I do so not because I am not aware that our countries - almost without exception - are experiencing economic difficulties. Quite to the contrary I take the serious view that the resources put at the disposal of the Organization must be used rationally and frugally. And over the last few years, we have managed to do just that. But rationalization and frugality in circumstances of non-additionality of resources and of competing needs will not give us the capacity to work. The OAU simply needs more resources if it is to deliver and to live up to the expectations of Member States. And whatever one may say, no matter how much poverty we may plead, I do not believe that our collective of fifty-two Member States can not meet the resource needs of the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

We are giving ourselves new responsibilities and challenges. It will not be possible to be credible or to be taken seriously by the outside world if we deny ourselves the means of doing what we say we want to do and achieve. I therefore earnestly hope that this Council will see the

question of arrears as a serious handicap and take resolution to deal with it conclusively. It is only through providing the Organization with the resources to perform that the Member States can, in an effective and practical way, reinforce their political will and support to the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

Yes Africa still has problems. And if we enumerate them, it is not to give credence to those who wish to perpetuate the image of Africa as a continent condemned to political confusion and economic backwardness. Quite to the contrary it is to be candid and to show the magnitude of the challenge before our countries and Continent. These problems will not be resolved by foreign philanthropists or perpetual aid giving good samaritans from the developed countries. If anything, it is becoming increasingly clear that the world is no longer interested in the misery and poverty of Africa. Africa can therefore not afford to continue living under the illusion of unending foreign assistance. It must seize the challenge and look to itself for the solutions of its problems; and to be a meaningful partner in international cooperation.

But we should not look at ourselves solely in terms of the problems we have. Africa has made tremendous achievements which we have the right to be proud of. Africa is free and notwithstanding the difficulties, real advances in the social and economic fields have been made. As a continent, we strike a note of unity and solidarity under the OAU. What these achievements mean is that Africa can stand up and do something for itself. Of course if one looks at the statistics in their

absolute, or listen to what is being said about Africa by the outside world, the temptation to get discouraged can be very real indeed. If you look at the poverty, the deprivation and the suffering in the Continent, the infants and young children who are robbed of their parents and livelihood in conflicts and wars, it is easy to fall into despondency and despair. Yes there are many problems in the Continent. The economies must be rebuilt, the political transition in Africa needs to be well managed, conflicts must be resolved, the environment must be safeguarded, health problems and especially the Aids Pandemic must be dealt with. We cannot begin doing any of these if we are discouraged by the detractors of the Continent or by the sheer magnitude of the task. We need to defeat self-doubt which years of colonialism has left embedded in our thinking. We should not doubt ourselves, or our abilities simply because we have had limited success in our efforts in the past. We therefore need to rebuild our confidence and adopt a CAN-DO-ATTITUDE. Africa has the ability, the means and the will to prevail. What we have now, which we lacked in the eighties is direction and manifest determination. We now have an agenda and the direction. We are united in our purpose to pursue that agenda. We must stay the course and allow no one to divert us from it. Together, in unity and solidarity we will triumph.

I thank you.