

STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE OAU AT THE FLAG RAISING CEREMONY FOR ADMISSION
OF SOUTH AFRICA INTO OAU MEMBERSHIP
WEDNESDAY, 25 MAY 1994

Your Excellency
Mr. Alfred Nzo, Foreign Minister
of the Republic of South Africa,
Your Excellency, the Executive Secretary
of the ECA,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the third time within the last four years that we have had to assemble here to welcome into our midst the birth and admission of a new nation. Our presence here this afternoon has a dimension quite different from the previous occasions. It makes it unique in its symbolism as in its essence.

The presence in our midst of H.E. Alfred Nzo, the Foreign Minister of the new Republic of South Africa is without precedent, and serves to underline the unique importance of the occasion. The ceremony we are about to perform here is the culmination of the historic event that took place in Pretoria on 10th May, 1994, when following a resounding victory of the African National congress (ANC) in first ever truly democratic nation-wide general elections universally acclaimed to have been free and fair, Comrade Nelson Mandela was sworn in as the President of the Republic of South Africa. The

significance of that historic landmark which viewed in a historical context saw a former prisoner of Robben Island assuming the highest office in the land, or as some have described the event "from Prisoner to President", reverberates throughout the world because it was the culmination of a universal struggle against an inhuman system called "Apartheid".

For those of us who had the opportunity to be in Pretoria and also for the millions who watched the event live on television, it seemed, in the words of that indefatigable opponent of apartheid, Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, a great miracle was being performed in South Africa. Of course the inevitable end of the struggle was an article of faith to all those who were either in the struggle or closely associated with the struggle, only the prophets among us could have foreseen when, how, and under what circumstances victory was to be achieved. **FOUR MAGIC YEARS** have crowned decades of unremitting struggle with success. Tribute is due to the vision and courage of the political leaders of South Africa for making this possible. But special tribute is owed to President Nelson Mandela and former State President, F.W. de Klerk, the former for having pioneered, persevered and provided exceptional leadership in the struggle and for having an unshakable faith in the ultimate victory of a just cause; the latter for having had the courage and the foresight to usher in a path towards a negotiated end to the conflict.

We in Africa have suffered from various acts of man's inhumanity to man. But in recent times, none did more to affect the dignity of the African than **Apartheid**. Its philosophical assumptions were a serious threat to both the dignity and the very essence of humanity. The

struggle against Apartheid was therefore much more than a struggle for freedom for a people, it was a struggle for humanity. The significance of the event of May 10, can therefore be appreciated in its wider context, as a victory for humanity.

Second, Africa has known various forms of struggle, especially for freedom and knows the forces against whom the struggles were directed. It has always been acknowledged that Africa's foremost enemy, in terms of its capacity and capability, its viciousness and ruthlessness, was unquestionably the **Apartheid** regime. Events in Portugal could produce a chain reaction in the territories overseas. South Africa was however impervious to any development anywhere in the world. Africa therefore had to confront the apartheid system head on. The agonies of the Frontline States are matters for the record. The significance of the event of May 10, therefore springs from the fact that the sword of Damocles which seemed to hang over the head of Africa, the Frontline States in particular, has now disappeared. Put differently, the emergence of a democratic non-racial and united South Africa means that no longer will Africa have to be concerned with destabilization emanating from that country. Nor for that matter will Africa have to deal with the issue of apartheid which since the inception of the OAU has constituted one of its primary and engaging agendas.

The unique significance of the event we are about to witness also lies in the fact that it officially marks the closure of the chapter on decolonization. In this historic moment, it is only fitting to recall the words of the great African leader, a great Pan-Africanist, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah who, upon the independence of his

country, declared that the independence of Ghana will be incomplete without the total liberation of Africa. Certainly, today's event is an indication of that historic call. At the forthcoming Summit in Tunis, we shall have the occasion to say a little more on this important landmark. For the moment let me just say that the Thirty-year-plus struggle has finally come to an end. The closure of this window has made it possible for another to be opened for the OAU in its titanic struggle for the development of the continent. For me personally, it is a great honour that this historic landmark has taken place when I am the Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity, the Organization that has been at the forefront of the liberation of the continent.

Again in Tunis, we hope to pay appropriate tribute to all those who made the occasion possible. Foremost in my mind are the oppressed people of South Africa whose sacrifices have brought honour and dignity not only to themselves but to the whole of Africa. We remember in particular those who paid the supreme sacrifices so that their fellow country men and women could live in freedom, dignity and peace.

We also do register our profound appreciation and deep gratitude to the international community, for the consistent support given to the struggle for the liberation of Africa. We can never forget the role played by the Governmental Organizations such as the UN and its Specialized Agencies and Bodies, the Non-aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, as well as the Non-Governmental Organizations in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and America whose campaign in support of Sanctions became an effective weapon against Apartheid. And to those many others, individuals as well as groups,

countries and organizations that we are unable to name specifically, we say thank you for your solidarity and support.

It is for all these reasons that we heartily welcome the admission of the Republic of South Africa into the membership of the OAU. We are confident that the new South Africa will contribute to bring a new dynamism in the activities and operations of the OAU.

We are also confident that the new South Africa would be able to respond effectively to the aspirations of the people of South Africa. It is in this connection that we have welcomed the policy of reconciliation announced by the President of the Republic. We hope that like in Zimbabwe and Namibia where such a policy has been followed with great success, South Africa too would reap rich dividends from the pursuit of such a policy.

Your Excellencies,

Today, is also Africa Day, a **DAY** we have set aside in recognition of our struggle for liberation. It is therefore a happy coincidence that we should be admitting South Africa into our membership. It is also the Thirty First Anniversary of our Organization. As we stand here today, terrible and horrible things are happening in parts of the continent, especially in Rwanda, horrifying things that make us all feel terribly pained, and, yes, ashamed. Apart from the conflicts, millions of our people are again being threatened by drought and famine. These are not manufactured stories, they are true. They represent the magnitude of the problems facing us. Unless we resolve to address these problems seriously, we stand in danger of being consumed by them. We should not

expect help from outside, because the international community is increasingly becoming tired with our problems. Let us hope that the succeeding anniversaries would bring tidings of joy and prosperity.

Mr. Foreign Minister,

You are not a stranger to these premises or surroundings. In umpteen times you and your colleagues in the National Liberation Movement have been here working with us on many issues of African interest but especially on the struggle for the freedom of your people. Now you are here in a different capacity. You are here as the Representative of the Government of all the people of South Africa. We welcomed you then and we welcome you now even with a greater sense of emotion. The victory of your people has been our victory. No cause and no struggle has seen such a wide support on a global scale transcending racial, colour, religious and geographical divide.

We welcome South Africa as the 53rd Member of our Organization and through you, we say to our brothers and sisters in South Africa - black, white, brown and indeed South Africans of all colours and creed - welcome home to your African family.