

**REMARKS BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
CHAIRMAN MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION**

**ON THE**

**LAUNCH OF THE REPORT AND PHOTO  
EXHIBITION: “ EFFECTIVE LEADERS ?  
VIEWS FROM EAST AND CENTRAL  
AFRICA”**

**At the**

**NATIONAL MUSEUM**

*Dar es Salaam, 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2002*

Mr. Director

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me first of all to pay tribute to the British Council for sponsoring the research on the question of leadership in this region and congratulate the eight women researchers who undertook the study.

The research report is not only interesting in its findings but also tends to dispel some of the stereo type notions we may have had about some category of leadership in our communities. Indeed going through the report gives us some idea of people's perception on what effective leadership is and the social cost of a deficit in effective leadership to a community.

Experience has demonstrated that there has been at times a tendency to regard leaders as people with unlimited capacity to deliver on everything. This research report leaves us in no doubt that such expectations of our leaders are clearly exaggerated. The message which is carried in this report is not about a leader who carries with him or her solutions to all problems in her locality or environment but a leader who organises and inspires people into action to solve a particular problem.

The countries covered in the report are all passing through periods of transition to a democratic dispensation. The specific social contexts in each of the countries differ. And yet from the voices of those who were interviewed the yearning for good quality of leadership is unmistakable. The right to pass judgement on the performance of our leadership is a democratic right which in a country espousing democratic values is exercised through elections. The exercise of this right empowers our people over their leaders and holds them accountable. It is a right but also an obligation on all those who legally qualify to exercise it diligently. For at the end of the day, it is the choices we make as individuals which ultimately decide the quality of our leadership.

That is why I read with considerable concern the feeling of disillusionment and cynicism that is discernible in some of the statements attributed to some of the respondents interviewed in the course of the research. The reasons advanced are many but include the claim that once elected, some political leaders lose contact with the electorate and instead push their own individual agenda to advance their personal interests. Indeed some respondents have even gone so far as to write themselves off the list of those who are actively involved in choosing their leaders. They are claims that could have been a

result of specific local experiences. It is however my earnest hope that such experiences are rare and isolated.

For if this is a growing feeling among some section of our people in the region, it represents a development which if not seriously addressed could have negative consequences to the democratisation agenda the continent has set for itself. Appropriate and timely measures must therefore be taken by the relevant organs such as political parties and civil society to address the conditions which breed political apathy, disillusionment and cynicism.

It is important to emphasise that whatever the misgivings people must endeavour to remain engaged. In the democratisation process, they must refuse to succumb to the temptation of indifference, despair, and resignation. For, experience elsewhere has already demonstrated that when that happens, there is a real danger of the triumph of the forces of extremism who are always vigilant and actively engaged. The outcome of just concluded first round presidential elections in France should awaken us all.

This research is essentially about women leadership in the region. I commend the British Council for its timely initiative. In the history of our continent and of the

region covered by the Research, it is an incontestable fact that women have played an important and in some cases crucial role whether in the struggle for independence or in the socio-economic development. In all the countries covered by the research women have at several levels, demonstrated enormous talent and capacity for leadership. All this notwithstanding, the fact remains that women remain underrepresented in the decision making organs. The issue of women empowerment is therefore of particular relevance in the development of our societies. Yet we are aware of the numerous obstacles, cultural, economic, political and attitudinal that women continue to encounter. The research does bring out some of these obstacles as exemplified by the stereotype responses of some of the respondents vis a vis the role of women.

These obstacles must be overcome. There must be an equitable representation of women in the decision making processes. Ideally, if there exists a level ground field then such representation should be assured through the normal democratic processes. Yet we all know that given the prejudices and other factors that still stand on the way in many of our societies, the playing field is not yet that level. That is why in some instances it has been necessary to take affirmative action by setting statutory minimum representation for women in national

parliaments and other organs. Given this reality, I was somewhat surprised to read that this approach is not viewed favourably by many of the respondents. What other alternatives are therefore proposed in the interim to secure the much needed broaden political space for women and at the same time ensure the consolidation and strengthening of the democratic process ?

The concern for the quality of leadership is that it makes a difference and as a corollary to this imposes on us an obligation to get engaged. As the Chair or the British Council Ms. Helena Kennedy

“The whole point of getting more women into power is not just to increase numbers but also to support the creation of a new agenda in politics and the media, taking action that changes the lives of ordinary women for the better”.

This message is true for women in leadership positions as it is true for men in leadership. Leadership carries with it enormous responsibilities at whatever level it is exercised. Leaders must constantly ask themselves whether the decisions and actions are intended to make a difference in the lives of the ordinary people in the communities they represent. They must pay special

attention to the needy and most vulnerable groups in the societies. Indeed they must show that they care and speak for the voiceless and in a developing country like ours, they must participate effectively in the war against poverty, ignorance and diseases.

It is my hope that the British Council having taken the initiative in sponsoring this research, will not let the document lie on the shelves but will assist in sending the message it carries to the different stake holders. It would be sad to see that this interest in effective leadership is limited to the leadership we always encounter in the formal structures of governance such as national parliaments and local government councils. While the leadership in these formal structures deserves our concern because of the enormous influence they have on our lives, we must not forget to pay equal attention on the quality of leadership in the peoples own organizations which constitute civil society. A well managed village cooperative or a committee that manages the village Water Fund might be closer to the hearts of rural women than a member of Parliament who because of her or his further manifold responsibilities might not be a constant focal point on the scene.

Finally let me stress that training in the basics of leadership is important. It is my hope that the British

Council would follow-up this research report with a training programme for women in various leadership positions.

I thank you very much.