

Pl. Victoria 86

THE PRIORITIES AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE OAU ON THE EVE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

**LECTURE DELIVERED BY
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TO THE GERMAN SOCIETY ON FOREIGN
POLICY.**

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Dr. Werner Lamby, President of the German Society for Foreign Relations,

Your Excellency, Dr. Klaus Kinkel, Vice -Chancellor and

Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, of the Federal Republic of Germany,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish from the outset to express my appreciation to the President and the Leadership of the German Association for Foreign Relations for having kindly organized this meeting. I also wish to thank the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and especially Dr. Klaus Kinkel, the Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs for the kind invitation extended to me to visit Germany and the opportunity afforded me to address this important gathering.

My present visit to this country comes following the visit of Professor Dr. Roman Herzog, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany to Addis Ababa, the Headquarters of the Organization of African Unity, last January. During his visit to Addis Ababa, we held very fruitful discussions with foreign Minister Kinkel and his Colleagues and explored ways and means of strengthening the relations between Africa and Germany. This visit also comes at a time when Germany is assuming an increasingly important role both in Europe and at the international level and at a time where we are witnessing greater interaction between Germany and Africa for mutual benefit. We in Africa are looking forward to enhanced and improved relations between our continent and this Great country. I know that these sentiments are shared by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. President Herzog made this point very eloquently when he addressed the African Community in Africa Hall on January 27 on the theme: "AFRICA AND GERMANY NEW CHALLENGES IN A PERIOD OF TRANSITION". In his powerful address President Herzog expressed his confidence in the capacity of Africa to overcome its

For Africa is changing and doing so essentially because the African people expect and clearly want changes. It is a continent in transition both in the political and economic domains. Economic reforms are increasingly becoming a rule rather than an exception. The process of democratization is firmly on course and despite setbacks here and there, the process is irreversible. The people of Africa who fought against colonialism and racism in our countries are more and more determined to exercise their destiny. They are determined to have a say on how they are governed, by whom and for what period. Having suffered the indignities of slavery and colonialism, they are equally determined to ensure that the issues of Human Rights and good governance are not treated as mere slogans in the continent. Indeed change is unmistakable.

It is important for the Friends of Africa to recognize and understand these changes. It is above all important to avoid generalisations about the continent. Yes, we have our problems. Yes we remain traumatised by the genocide in Rwanda. We are particularly afflicted by the tragedies in Somalia, Liberia and Burundi. But Africa cannot and should not be viewed simply in the context of these conflict situations. We in Africa have fully shared with our European friends their concerns on the agony, suffering and destruction that has been taking place in some places in Europe. We have however never confused these events with the rest of Europe.

I have thought it necessary to preface my substantive remarks with these observations because I sincerely believe that a major contribution that can be made in support of Africa's efforts at socio-economic development and its monumental challenge of managing the political and economic transition, is for our friends, to understand the realities of Africa. Indeed I recall that during the official talks that I held with Foreign Minister Kinkel at the OAU

energies to asserting the African people as an entity and a partner in international relations. In other words, the organization invested a lot of time to restore the dignity and pride of our Continent and its people as they emerged from the dark period of slavery and colonialism.

Towards the end of the 70's and during the 80's which witnessed the political emancipation, by and large, of our Continent from colonialism, and with Apartheid coming to an end, our Continental organization opened a new chapter to concentrate more on socio-economic development of the Continent. It was the period where our Continent set up various ambitious strategies and plans both at sectoral and global levels aimed at uplifting our Continent and people from underdevelopment and poverty. This period witnessed intensive collective action by African countries aimed at engaging our Continent on the path to development. At international level, our countries made a strong case for international cooperation and solidarity. At Continental level, these efforts culminated in the adoption in 1980 of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act which set up a strategy for economic development of our Continent through the mobilization of its own resources and with the support of the international community. As you are all aware, the hopes and expectations of our people and countries in the 70's were severely frustrated as the Continent plunged into a severe socio-economic crisis in the 80's - a period that some have characterized as a lost decade for Africa.

It is against this background of dashed hopes that our Continent has over the last few years been striving to re seize the initiative and engage itself, with new resolve and determination, on the path towards economic and social development, progress and peace. In 1990, the African Heads of State and Government, meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during their annual Summit made a critical review

security, the challenge of economic development and integration and the challenge of democratization of our societies.

Since the adoption of the 1990 Declaration, our main area of concentration and focus has been on promoting peace, security and stability on the Continent. As you know, conflicts continue to prevail in many parts of the Continent and constitute our daily concern in the OAU. Conflicts are causing considerable human suffering and destruction of property and infrastructure in our Continent. They are generating millions of refugees and displaced persons in Africa. They are subjecting generations of young Africans to violence, hatred and destruction. Conflicts are also causing an acute humanitarian situation and traumatizing a considerable segment of our society. People in conflict situations, at best live in precarious and uncertain conditions .

Some of the deadly and unacceptable instruments of warfare have caused death and permanent injuries and disability during the conflicts and even long after the wars are over. The case in point is the anti-personnel mines which has been extensively used in some conflict situations and have caused such havoc and destruction in countries like Angola and Somalia. Conflicts are also depriving our Continent from the use of its immense resources both human and material , at a time when Africa badly needs the energies of all its people to forge ahead with its development. Conflicts have torn apart the social fabric of the African society. They have separated and split families and communities, as millions of our people have been forced to vote with their feet. In sum, the scourge of conflicts has been one of the most destabilising factors and has severely undermined our efforts at promoting socio-economic development.

It was in recognition of the profound aspiration of our people for

Over the last few years, we have drawn lessons from our experience. We recognize the importance of acquiring the necessary information, experience and equipment to be able to adequately follow and analyse developments in the Continent, with a view to anticipating and preventing conflicts. That is why we have, during the last few months, been busy trying to establish an Early Warning System on Conflict Situations in Africa, to be based in the Conflict Management Centre we have just completed at the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa. This is clearly an area where we need to direct our energies and resources in cooperation with all those interested in Conflict anticipation and prevention in Africa.

Apart from the important task of anticipating and preventing conflicts, our Organization is fully committed to deploying efforts aimed at resolving conflicts in our Continent. This determination was amply demonstrated through the sustained efforts deployed by our Organization and countries of the region in Rwanda and which led to the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement, before the unfortunate and catastrophic developments which subsequently engulfed that country. The Organization has also exerted tremendous efforts in the search for peace and understanding in Burundi. Indeed, the crisis in Burundi as was also the case in Rwanda, is one in which our Organization invested a lot of efforts and resources. In fact, the OAU has been present in Burundi immediately after the inception of the crisis in that country and has virtually left no stone unturned in the search for peace. I personally went to Burundi soon after the political crisis that erupted following the assassination of President Ndadaye. I have since been to that country several times. Our Organization has deployed an observer Mission in Burundi, composed of civilians and military Officers which remained there till the most recent development in that country which saw the taking over of power by Major Buyoya. The mediation efforts of the Former President of Tanzania Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, aimed at assisting in resolving the Conflict in

session of the Commission is also expected to relaunch the implementation process of the Abuja Treaty and adopt a plan of action for the establishment of the African Economic Community.

Parallel to the integration efforts, our Continent has been undertaking bold economic and structural reforms aimed at improving the performance and efficiency of the African economies. These reforms are being made in a context of severe socio-economic conditions confronting our countries and in a particularly difficult international economic environment. These efforts by our countries are also severely hampered by the unbearable debt burden. The economic reforms which have in the last few years been implemented in nearly all African countries have had their social cost especially among the most vulnerable segments of our populations. These negative effects include, lowering of health, nutritional and educational levels for millions of children; rampant unemployment and underemployment, particularly among the Youth, Women, School - Leavers and even among University graduates, and generally increasing poverty for the majority. These social problems need to be effectively addressed if the on-going important economic and political reforms are to be sustained and achieve their intended objectives.

Mr. Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen

The other important and exciting challenge facing our Continent and our Organization is that of democratization. Since 1990, significant progress has been made by most of our countries in meeting the aspirations and general expectations of our people. Most of our countries have been undergoing a transition from single party systems to political pluralism. The protection and promotion of human rights are increasingly being given more

At the same time, our Partners in the rest of the world should appreciate the conditions and circumstances our countries are experiencing. Indeed it is up to each people to chart their destiny. If democracy flourishes and endures in Africa, it will not be because outsiders like to see Africa become democratic, but will occur to the extent that African people themselves wish to tread that path and to the degree that our people are willing to struggle for the attainment of that objective.

This is not to say that external factors are not operative or that they are not important. Far from that. All I am saying, is that it is important that the practice of democracy in Africa should be sensitive to African realities, values and heritage. In this, I am not implying that there must be a specific type of democracy for Africa. The fundamental principles of democracy are of a universal validity. Their application however must take into account the specificities of every society. What is important in my view is to ensure that the process towards democratization on our Continent takes root in our societies and that our people, men, women and youth are gradually empowered to take charge of their destiny. Above all, let me repeat, the peoples of Africa must be able to decide and do so freely on how they are governed, by whom and for what duration. They should be able to effect the change of leadership peacefully through the ballot box.

It is also important in my view that we concentrate on building solid institutions and inculcating among our people and children a culture of peace and tolerance to sustain democracy in our Continent and to ensure that the resources and energies of our people are released towards socio-economic endeavors. Our people, like any other people aspire for peace, security, freedom, justice, equity and well-being. Our people who have experienced humiliation and deprivation of basic human rights during the colonial period

work to emerge as a dynamic, modern and effective organization. This is indeed an enormous task which lies ahead and which is worthy taking up and which in my opinion merits the support and assistance of the friends of Africa among whom I am pleased to count the Federal Republic of Germany.

I thank you for your attention.