

Focus

Salim's mission of promoting African unity

By Tunde Fatunde

AFRICA is a land of contrasts. Africans' sensibilities to major events on the continent are either dampened or galvanised into positive action. People become indifferent and at times angry when those who are entrusted with governance misbehave or trample upon peoples, human and material rights. On the other hand, it is always a moment of joy and jubilation when some personalities with very enviable record of positive achievements get into limelight. Because, Africans, just like any other members of the human race, are always hopeful that such persons would through hard work and commitment work for the interest of the society.

And, in the last few months on our poverty-stricken continent, people have risen and are still rising against corrupt civilian and military tyrants, dictators and self-acclaimed Best Presidents-for-Life. At the same time, Africans, irrespective of their nationality, class and religion, are unanimous in their show of respect and appreciation for two outstanding political figures on the continent: Nelson Mandela and Salim Ahmed Salim — the sixth Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

On July 27 1989, at the end of Africa's decade of economic disaster, the summit meeting of OAU's Heads of State in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, elected Salim Salim, 48-years-old, as the Secretary-General of the organisation. Both in diplomatic and intellectual circles on the continent, the election was greeted with positive reaction. It was felt that with OAU's record of successful failures in some vital areas of human endeavour, there was the urgent need to fill the post of secretary-general with someone who is a *tested and credible* diplomat in African affairs and world politics.

Hardly did anyone foresee the magnitude of the events in Eastern and Central Europe and their serious implications for Africa, when last year's OAU summit arrived at one of its very few wise and visionary decisions in electing Salim as OAU's Chief Executive for the next four years.

Born on January 23, 1942, on the island of Zanzibar, which is an integral part of Julius Nyerere's Tanzania, Salim started his diplomatic career at an incredibly young age of 20 when he was made the deputy representative of Tanzania in Cuba. Little did he realize that as a diplomat from a credible country with a credible President, i.e. Julius Nyerere, who committed Tanzania's meagre resources to the cause of Africa's liberation, he, Salim, was going to defend simultaneously the legitimate interests of Tanzania and Africa. After staying for three years in Cuba, he became the substantive ambassador of his country there. As a result of his dynamic role and also because of the immense confidence which Julius Nyerere had in him, he was made at various times an ambassador in Egypt, India and China.

It was with his posting to the United Nations (UN) as Tanzania's Permanent Representative that Salim further consolidated his illustrious role as one of Africa's leading super-diplomats. A man of foresight, he enrolled and obtained a Master's degree (MSc) in International Relations at New York's Columbia University because he felt that as a career diplomat he needed to be properly grounded in the theory of international politics. Armed with the complex theory of world politics, he became a more experienced diplomat on the field.

For example, his defence of Africa's cause at the UN is still a source of pride for the continent. As both



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the chairman of the UN's Special Committee on Decolonisation, and

that of the Security Council on Sanctions against Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Salim was very uncompromising in his determination in ensuring that world opinion understood and also supported Africa's position against colonial and racist domination of our continent. He also served as the President of the 34th session of UN's General Assembly as well as the assembly's sixth and seventh special emergency sessions.

At a point, Salim was appointed the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN itself. It is on record that he played a very prominent role in the admission of the Peoples Republic of China into the United Nations. That was in 1971. And when he vied for the post of the Secretary-General of the UN, after the departure of Dr. Kurt Waldheim, the United States of America opposed his candidacy because of his support for China's admission into the organisation. Back at home, Salim has occupied the post of foreign minister, defence minister and prime minister.

Armed with impressive diplomatic and intellectual experience accumulated over many years, Salim Ahmed Salim was well-equipped before taking over the running of the OAU. Thus, within six months of being effectively in charge of the OAU Secretariat in Addis Ababa, his knowledge of the problems confronting the organisation and also possible solutions to them are highly commendable. In an exclusive interview granted to both Dr. Olatunji Dare, Chairman

of the *Guardian's* Editorial Board and Mr. Eluem Emeka Izeze, Editor of *The Guardian* on Sunday, Salim spoke the truth when he declared: "I was not under illusion as to the magnitude of the task that faces us and also the problem that lies ahead."

Salim has a stake in the OAU. When it was created in May 1963, i.e. 27 years ago, he knew about most of the details and groundwork carried out by his President — Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sekou Toure of Guinea just to mention a few. Between then and now, very reliable sources have it that Salim is one of the few existing African diplomats who have a first-hand knowledge of the growth, development and the future of the OAU because he was directly or tangentially involved in the organisation's most difficult periods of acute crisis which faced it during its 27 years of existence.

Despite these problems, he stated categorically at the aforementioned interview with *The Guardian* editors that the OAU has nearly completed the task of anti-colonial struggle which it set for itself. In his own words: "I think the OAU has every right to be proud with the process of decolonisation. The founding fathers met in 1963 and established the organisation and the OAU Liberation Committee and, looking back, I think Africa has every right to be proud of her achievements. These achievements could not have been possible but for a united African position."

However, he does not play down the only major decolonisation task currently facing the entire African

continent: *dismantling of apartheid and the creation of a united democratic and non-racial South African society.* In this regard, Salim Salim strongly believes that Africa must continue to insist on the diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions against South Africa for as long as apartheid remains fundamentally intact. He is merely re-emphasising OAU's Harare Declaration on this matter.

Diplomatic sources revealed that Salim is not happy with some Eastern and Central European countries especially Czechoslovakia and Hungary who are now aiding and abetting apartheid by re-establishing diplomatic relations with South Africa at the ambassadorial level! The same diplomatic sources stated that he has already set in motion moves to dissuade these countries from such unfriendly acts whose long-term implications would certainly hurt the interests of such countries in post-apartheid South Africa whose emergence is just a matter of time and patience.

A mastery of Africa's economic predicament and possible alternatives by Salim has never been doubted. He is right in stating that economic liberation of our neo-colonised continent naturally comes simultaneously with political independence. Africa is still dependent, almost exclusively, on export of primary commodities, literally without exception, have their prices plummeting."

He criticises the effectiveness of economic reforms "suggested" and imposed upon Africa by both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). "They made a recommendation, and by sheer necessity of survival, we have accepted the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in our continent, in most of our countries with the social and political consequences of some of these programmes. So it is not that Africa is not prepared to undertake some bold measures; we are taking bold measures but no matter how bold these measures are, if the international economic climate continues to be hostile, these is a limit to which Africa can be in a position to overcome the present difficulties," he declared.

One of the indices of what Salim describes as the hostile international economic climate towards Africa is the debt problem. In his own words: "The debt situation in Africa is hanging on our neck like an albatross. And there is no doubt, that, increasingly, most of our countries will simply reach a stage where they are completely unable to meet their obligation. It is not that they don't want to meet the obligations, but they are unable to meet them."

He remarks that the capital outflow from Africa is currently estimated at \$50 billion. And this kind of outflow has an adverse effect on continental economy. The emergence of a single monetary unit in Western Europe, in 1992 coupled with the flow of Western investment into Eastern Europe and the implications for Africa have attracted Salim's attention. For him, Africa has no other alternative than to implement the 1980 OAU's Lagos Plan of Action as the basis of economic survival. The era of uncoordinated economic and financial actions in Africa is gone. According to him: "There is no alternative for Africa but to try first to work as a unit. I personally believe that it is a mistake for any African country to believe that it can solve its economic problems on its own, even on the debt situation."

and are still using organised religions, especially Christianity and Islam, as instruments of dividing and ruling African peoples. Moreover, this deliberate division of African peoples is being funded and aided by foreign collaborators of these African Presidents with inordinate ambition. Thus, Africa is being mentally and even physically balkanized along religious cleavages. Consequently, Pan-Africanism suffers. Rulers teach their subjected and subjugated citizens that there exists so-called "Arab" and "Islamic" Africa and so called "Negro-Berber-Christian" Africa. Divide and rule in action.

Salim, taking a cue from Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral — leading Pan-Africanists, insists that... "when you die, those who believe in God, whether you are a Moslem or a Christian, you are going to meet on a day of reckoning. On the day of reckoning, you are not going to hold a meeting there to negotiate. It is everybody's individual faith. So there is no reason whatsoever why

religion should be a factor of division either in a country or in a continent. So, in Africa, we must not entertain any attempt to divide us on the basis of religion... Let us not forget also that there has been an attempt to divide our continent on the basis of race, religion and colour. Africa cannot afford to be divided either on racial grounds or religious grounds. We have to fight anything which tends to divide us."

If one draws a practical lesson from the adage that a tree cannot make a forest and that two heads are better than one, then one can categorically state that Salim Ahmed Salim can only succeed if OAU member-states are committed through concrete actions to the implementation of the goals and objectives of the organisation. One of the disheartening realities of our continental organisation is the lack of funds. Without proper funding by member-states, Salim Salim,

even with the best of intentions, cannot be effective. It is an open secret that very many member-states are not paying their dues as and when required. And the same member-states are alive to their financial obligations when it comes to non-African organisations controlled by their erstwhile colonial masters.

Another possible obstacle which could hinder Salim's tenure of office is the issue of integrity, moral probity and the culture of public accountability among African rulers. It is sad to note the bitter truth that Africa is unfortunately blessed mainly with rulers who in most cases lack integrity, moral probity, hate public accountability and are perpetually disobeying the rule of law which they themselves participate in formulating.

A literary reproduction of misrule by African rulers is to be found in Chinua Achebe's *Anhills of The Savannah*. When most of these ambitious rulers dominate the African scene, they can, through their state policies, violate and in fact rape the ideals of the OAU. In this kind of political climate, therefore, it is then possible that Salim Salim's initial optimism in promoting the OAU's goals could be drowned in a sea of irresponsibilities encouraged by Africa rulers.

It is hoped that African rulers in the face of a "changing" world would work together in ensuring the success of OAU Africa's only voice and instrument of collective action. If that should be the case, one is then confident that Salim Ahmed Salim's tenure would usher in a more virile, dynamic and credible OAU secretariat.