STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF TANZANIA AND
FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
AT THE CONFERENCE
"ONE KENYA, ONE DREAM: THE KENYA WE WANT"

REFLECTIONS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR RESOLVING INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND BUILDING SUSTAINABLE NATIONHOOD – THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

NAIROBI
04 FEBRUARY 2009

STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF
TANZANIA AND FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE CONFERENCE "ONE KENYA, ONE DREAM:
THE KENYA WE WANT"
NAIROBI, 04 FEBRUARY 2009

REFLECTIONS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR RESOLVING INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND
BUILDING SUSTAINABLE NATIONHOOD – THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Distinguished Participants,

It is an honour for me to join you at this unique occassion as you discuss your vision for Kenya. The composition of this forum and the theme that is being addressed underlines a profound desire on your part as Kenyans to come together, to reflect on your situation, and to commit yourselves to shaping a Kenya that you all can collectively desire. I am aware that you have had similar encounters before, at different scales and perhaps more statutory. This one is unique, because it is inspired by a future whose stakes are higher than ever before.

I have been asked to contribute to the topic this afternoon which is International Best-Practices in Resolving Internal Conflicts and Building Nationhood. i have come to share my experiences with you and to learn from you on what sort of Kenya you want to build.

1

i would like to compliment your ideas by providing you with an overview derived from my experience of being a Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity for 12 years, at a time when the continent was engulfed in incessant civil strife from Algeria to Angola, from Chad to Congo Brazzaville, from Central Africa Republic to the Democratic Republic of Congo, from Liberia to Somalia and from the Comoros to Sierra Leone. Every year, half of my Introductory Notes to the Report of the Secretary General for the Assembly of Heads of State and Government was dominated by issues related to conflict management and resolution.

In this respect, I will confine myself to Africa and perhaps leave it to other participants to make reference to experiences from outside the Continent, probably including cases such as those of Ireland, El-Salvador, Vietnam, East Timor or even the post-civil war America.

Distinguished Participants

Allow me, still in my preliminary remarks, to point out a couple of related caveats to this discussion. First, the notion of 'best practice' needs to be handled with care, as always. Not only are there challenges related to the specific content of a given practice in relation to the circumstances of where it succeeded, but also the question of time-frame for designating it as a best

practice for resolving conflict needs to be cautiously taken into account. While some mechanisms have provided for a relatively longer period of peace and tranquillity in one post-conflict situation in other cases the same mechanisms generated peace for only a very short period . In this respect, the notion of 'best practice' should not be a substitute for the fundamental principles of peace, stability and nationhood.

Another component of the 'best practice' caveat relates also to the notion of 'conflict resolution', particularly in the multiple phases that it entails. Obviously the demands and intervention called for during the eruptive and emergency phase of the conflict are different from those of the transition and the subsequent development phase of post-conflict reconstruction. The point here, is that the emulation of other experiences has also to be taken within the appropriateness of their timeframe.

Secondly, while conflict resolution is a post-crisis undertaking, the project of building nationhood often precedes conflict and is ideally part of the routine responsibility of a system of governance way before conflict occurs. Indeed, while fractures and damages are inflicted on nationhood, a post-conflict situation can also present an opportunity of consolidating nationhood and reinvigorating the bonds of collective belonging.

Let me now turn to the Continent at large and attempt to highlight the salient factors underlying tensions that caused the violent eruptions of the post-independence period, which climaxed in the 80s and 90s. My objective is to explore if there are lessons to be learnt from how tensions were overcome in a sustainable way to allow for the building of nationhood.

To begin with it is important to point out the obvious. This is that the many Conflicts in the continent vary in terms of their scale, intensity, duration, and root causes. They all express themselves in various forms – depending on the root causes, the extent to which the population is involved, the nature of the state – strong or weak state the latter ending in collapse and the extent of regional and external role in the conflict. Despite these variations, there are fundamental and root causes which are common in almost all these conflicts although some specific cause may be more important in one conflict and less so in another. Further these causes contribute directly to the form in which a specific conflict takes.

Obviously, the Nigerian civil war of the mid 1960s; the Angolan civil war of the 70s; the anarchy in Somalia starting in the early 90s; the rebel movements around the Mano River provide us with a diverse character of the conflicts we have experienced and the range of measures that have been taken to bring some of them to rest. The war in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo at one time was described as Africa's world war given the involvement of several African armies. The violent conflict in the other Congo, that we witnessed, involved not only the national army but also bands of militia code named the Ninja, the Cobra and the Zulus owing allegiance to the key political leaders of the country. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994; the 20 years North/South civil war in Sudan culminating in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005 and the crisis in Darfur or the recent developments in Zimbabwe during this decade are all the different facets of the African tragedy. In some cases it has confounded many of us, such as the case of Cote d'Ivoire – which was seemingly politically stable, rich in social diversity, economically robust, but suddenly broke down and has taken several years to mend. We have seen a small archipelago, such as the Comoros going through a continuing relapse of tension and instability including being a victim of perhaps the largest number of coups and counter coups led by or inspired by mercenaries from outside the continent.

Notwithstanding the different contexts, the variety of causes, magnitude of the tension of conflict, it is possible to encapsulate the commonalities in the reasons underlying conflict in our Continent. Allow me to be schematic on highlighting these factors.

The first set of factors relate to alienation and a circumscribed political space. Whatever descriptions one would give to this

phenomenon, exclusion and the monopoly of political power has been the greatest catastrophe for this continent. Commentaries abound on the character of the African state and the way it has fostered undemocratic cultures which have been a source of tension and mayhem on our continent. The worst part is when the process of exclusion and alienation has fallen along some primordial identities of ethnicity, religion, race, or even regionalism. Such situations have fostered intolerance, discrimination and even the denial of fundamental rights.

This also brings to the fore the crucial importance of managing diversity. Africa as a continent is multi-ethnic, multiracial, multi-coloured and multi-religious. The real challenge facing all our societies is how to make use of this diversity as a source of strength rather than a source of division and fragmentation. It is also a continent where democracy and multiparty setups are gaining momentum despite setbacks here and there. Yet for democracy to consolidate in Africa the culture of a democracy and tolerance must prevail. In all our societies we must put an end to a situation where political differences are accentuated to hostile relations. Put differently, we must stop treating our political opponents as enemies or as being less patriotic.

A second set of causes of tension on the Continent relates to marginalization and unequal access to public resources. Extreme forms of these types of tension manifested themselves in the monopoly of basic resources such as minerals, oil, land,

and even the national flora and fauna. In most cases complicity with external forces exacerbates this type of tension whose eruptions are frequent and long-lasting. A more nascent nature is the irregular distribution and access to public goods and services whereby some social groups are denied full access to these benefits and thus live in utter poverty.

The third category of conflicts has been triggered by the failure of the 'nation-building project' in some parts of our Continent. While there are a few leaders who succeeded to create nations out of the state boundaries they inherited at independence, others neglected that undertaking. In the latter group, social identity remained primordial – in the form of ethnic, religious, racial or even regional. The state became simply an arena for exercising and enhancing advantages and excluding those who were considered as adversaries.

Distinguished Participants

How were these dysfunctions addressed in the dozens of conflict resolution processes that we witnessed in the past decade and a half?

The opening of political space and the fostering of inclusive governance has been largely a constitutional process, coupled with intensive civic education, as well as reforms in the operations of the state machinery, including in this case the

administrative systems. Almost in all post-conflict mediation cases that I have been involved with, the issues of power, rights and responsibilities, allocation of roles and functions, guarantees and the delineation of public space have been at the fore.

The issue of marginalization and equitable access to public goods and services is the most challenging. While it has often appeared in the 3rd stage of conflict resolution – the development phase – it has often-times been the most difficult. It not only involves redistribution of existing assets, but it also necessitates the mobilization and redirection of new investments, a process that has not been very forthcoming. I would say, among countries that have come out of a conflict situation, the positive example so far is being demonstrated by initiatives being undertaken by South Africa in terms of development programs, as well as Mozambique and Rwanda. Indeed, the processes relating to post-conflict reconstruction with a view to rectifying previous anomalies are complex. They range from planning and budgeting to fiscal and administrative systems.

As earlier mentioned, the issue of nation building and re-kindling the spirit of nationhood in the case of national fracture is a continuous one. It involves promoting processes which transcend narrow identities and relationships. It involves the harnessing of diversities and transforming them into national

and individual strengths. It is a socio-cultural as well as a political undertaking. It calls for the cultivation of respect and tolerance. The media deployed for this to succeed range from pedagogical institutions, administrative recruitments, neighbourhood designs and culture to political associations. The rainbow nation of South Africa once again demonstrates to us all a movement towards that direction.

I should conclude also by pointing out that key to the success of all these interventions is a strong and committed leadership that steers the country along the path of peace and togetherness; a leadership that strives to fight against corruption which is endemic in many of our countries; a leadership that struggles to improve the life of its people including respect and observance of human rights. In all cases where sustainable peace and nationhood have been promoted the role of leaders, at every level, has been critical. These initiatives aimed at forging peace and reconciliation have to be localized to reach the neighbourhood level and even the family level. Indeed, while national frameworks and accords are important to achieve, but sustainability can only be assured if the people are involved, if neighbours who had disputes reconcile, forgive each other, and commit themselves to sharing a common destiny. Peace and nationhood can only be anchored in the people.

This then brings me to the inspirational success story of Ghana. Last year that first African independent state south of the Sahara celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. As you may all recall this country had undergone serious convulsions following the overthrow of its first and founding president Dr. Kwame Nkurumah. There have been coups and counter coups with considerable blood letting. But in 1992 the people of Ghana went to the polls in an election which was universally acclaimed as a credible one. Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings became a duly elected President leading the National Democratic Congress and was re-elected in 1996. But in 2000 Ghanians voted for the leader of the opposition New Patriotic Party President Kuofor thereby unseating the ruling Party whose flag bearer was the then Vice President under President Rawlings, Professor Mills. In 2004 the NPP again won.

In December last year the Fifth Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held. I was privileged to lead the African Union Observer Team to those elections which were hotly contested. And Professor Mills of the NDL won by a very slender majority. Two months or so before the election there was rife speculation that violence would break out but this prophecy of gloom did not come to pass. Notwithstanding incidents that occurred here and there the people of Ghana and their leaders demonstrated great maturity. This was of course made possible by their adherence to the country's constitution and the rules and regulations governing elections. The

Independent Electoral Commission and especially its Chairman conducted themselves with professionalism and impeccable integrity. The Security Services performed their role in an impartial and professional manner. Democracy consolidated itself in Ghana. What would have been a disaster became a moment of glory for the people of Ghana. The people of Ghana simply refused to allow their country to descend into chaos. In my meeting with various sections of the populations, I was impressed by their dogged determination that whatever happened, they wanted peace and justice to prevail in their country. Despite serious political differences among them I kept hearing one message loud and clear: THIS IS THE ONLY COUNTRY WE HAVE. WE MAY SUPPORT THIS OR THAT PARTY BUT WE WANT PEACE AND JUSTICE TO PREVAIL. AND WE WILL BE GUIDED BY THE COUNTRY'S CONSTITUTION.

I firmly believe that Ghana gave our CONTINENT A BEAUTIFUL NEW YEAR GIFT. I hope we can all learn from that experience.

ASANTENI SANA.

GOD BLESS KENYA