



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING AND DEDICATION OF
ACDESS HEADQUARTERS BUILDING AND FACILITIES**

IJEBU-ODE, NIGERIA

21 DECEMBER 2000

**Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Executive Director
African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies,**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure for me to be here at Ijebu-Ode and to participate at this ceremony of great significance for ACDESS and for African development institutions in general. I wish to convey my gratitude and appreciation to Professor Adedeji for inviting me to this occasion, and I would like to congratulate the leadership and staff of ACDESS for the important achievement. For me personally, this occasion evokes special sentiments. Together with outstanding leaders and personalities like the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the First President of the United Republic of Tanzania, I was a founding member of this important institution. I have, therefore, been associated with this Centre right from its creation.

The event of this morning is both a celebration and a tribute. We are celebrating the official opening and dedication of ACDESS Headquarters building and facilities. This, indeed, is a major milestone for an institution that was founded only a decade ago. The impressive and modern outfit that has now become part of ACDESS represents the growth and development of this Centre. Furthermore, the self-reliant manner in which a large part of the resources for this building were procured is a reaffirmation of the vision and spirit that ACDESS leadership and its staff endeavour to promote for our Continent. Once again, Professor Adedeji and his colleagues in ACDESS have demonstrated through the completion of this building that where there is determination and commitment to self reliance, it is possible to attain objectives that may appear unachievable.

This building is, therefore, not simply the structure that it appears to be, with the modern facilities that it contains. Rather this is a testimony to the positive outcome accruing from dedication, determination and foresight.

This event also provides an opportunity to pay special tribute to Professor Adebayo Adedeji – a scholar, a diplomat, a statesman, a development practitioner, and a Pan-Africanist. This is a person who has devoted his whole life to promoting a deeper understanding of the African reality, to articulating the Continent's development concerns, and to adumbrating an alternative path for transformation. As we celebrate his birthday, we cannot, but take pride in his commitment to this continent, his sense of purpose, his clarity of vision, and the resilient determination that he has demonstrated in all his endeavours.

Some 11 years ago, when I took over the office of the Secretary General of the OAU, I found Professor Adedeji as the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa. He was in the front-line in the Continental efforts to chart out a development strategy that could help in arresting the

regressive trend that dominated African economies during the 1980s. He played an important role in defending an African perspective, at a time when the Continent was being subjected to a plethora of diagnosis and prescriptions. Indeed, the close working relationship that the OAU and ECA continue to maintain up to now bear a large imprint of Professor Adedeji's laudable contribution.

On a personal level, let me say what a pleasure and a privilege it was for me to begin my role as Secretary-General of the Continental Organization with the support, cooperation and friendship of Adebayo Adedeji. A pleasure, because his towering strength, based on knowledge, experience and commitment as Executive Head of the Economic Commission for Africa, was of great support to our Organization and to me personally as we endeavoured to promote the development and integration agenda of our Continent. A privilege, because he not only extended to me full cooperation and assistance, but above all, in word and deed, he was a friend and ally whose advice and experience I highly valued.

It is therefore a special privilege to be at Ijebu-Ode, Bayo's home town, when he is celebrating his 70th birthday. Indeed, I was simply determined not to miss this auspicious occasion.

Allow me, Ladies and Gentlemen, to wish our dear brother, colleague and friend a very happy birthday. May the Lord Almighty shower him with the energy and vigour to continue pursuing the endeavours he cherishes and which have always been for the interests of the people of this Continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do understand that for the past three days, as part of celebrating this event, ACDESS had convened an international millennium symposium on how to make our Continent face the challenges of a new century. Not only is this issue germane and critical at this particular juncture of our Continent's development, but the act of organizing an international symposium on this subject is also definitely quite a fitting manner of celebrating Professor Adedeji's birthday. It is consistent with his ardent emphasis on the people of this Continent to have clarity of vision, an empowering capacity, and a determination for self-initiated transformation. I look forward to reading the proceedings of your deliberations which I believe will serve as useful input to the work of both ACDESS and that of the OAU.

I had very much wanted to participate in some of your discussions. Unfortunately due to commitments at the Headquarters I was not able to do so. However, perhaps I should take this opportunity to underscore some aspects that you might have already addressed that relate to the challenges facing our Continent as we enter the new century and a new millennium.

On 31st October this year I met Professor Adedeji in Lusaka, Zambia, at the launching of the COMESA Free Trade Area. A special invitation was extended to the Professor in recognition of the important role he played in the 1970s and 1980s in establishing the Preferential Trade Area which was the precursor to COMESA. That event for me, and more particularly my encounter with Professor Adedeji, reaffirmed one important reflection: that is, there is a powerful dynamic that is gaining momentum in Africa and which has triggered a profound transformation of the Continent, and which is being driven by the African leaders and the African peoples themselves.

This dynamic manifests itself in various spheres. For example, in the area of economic cooperation and integration there is a stronger consolidation of our Regional Economic Communities, to the higher levels demonstrated by the Lusaka occasion and to addressing other critical engagements such as the promotion of peace, security and stability in the Continent. In the sphere of political and institutional development, significant steps are being taken in most African countries aimed at reforming political systems and enhancing democratic institutions and practices.

Other elements of the vibrant momentum emerging in Africa as we enter the new century include the determination of African leaders to assume a leading role in addressing the problem of conflicts in our Continent; the endeavour to develop common approaches and programmes in the various sectors of economic development. And, above all, the decision to establish an African Union, of which by this week two thirds of the OAU member states have already signed its Constitutive Act. All these measures define a new trajectory for Africa that derives from the realization that the destiny of this continent can be determined only by the energies and collective strength of the African peoples themselves.

In this respect, the paramount challenge facing the Continent as we enter the new century is how to surmount the obstacles which prevent the African people from realizing their collective potential. This should include the necessity to realign structures and resources for the promotion of sustainable growth and development as well as to confront the challenges, opportunities and dangers of globalization. Indeed, in doing so, we should vigorously strive for fundamental reforms in the modalities of global transactions. We would also be compelled to mobilize support from partners and friends. Nevertheless, in the end, the responsibility for acquiring a better tomorrow lies in our own hands as African people.

For me, and the significance of Professor Adedeji's special invitation at the launching of the COMESA Free Trade Area, is that the momentum that is galvanizing in the Continent as we enter the 21st Century derives from the experience and efforts of the 1980s. It is such landmark initiatives as the Lagos Plan of Action that led to the Abuja Treaty which has now been redynamized into the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Similarly, the

coordinated programmes in the various sectors currently being pursued derive their basis from the same experience and initiatives. The vision espoused by African Heads of State and Government at the Summit held in Addis Ababa, in July 1990, in which they defined Africa's response to the fundamental changes at the global level, remain poignantly valid and has provided a framework for many of the subsequent decisions.

While acknowledging this positive reality, at this juncture an important question one can pose, is what is the role of institutions such as ACDESS in pursuing Africa's agenda for development at the advent of this new century. Obviously, the impressive track record of ACDESS during its decade of existence, and that of many of its counterparts, reaffirms that there is an important role for such institutions. Indeed, the importance of knowledge and information in modern development underscores the critical role that policy and strategic studies centres such as this one need to play in the process of governance. There is an overabundance of information about varying development experience that can be accessed and which call for a necessity to determine the relevance of such information and to make it applicable to the African reality. Such tasks can only be performed by such specialized institutions like ACDESS.

Indeed, the increasing complexity of challenges facing our Continent calls for responses that have been rigorously reflected upon and whose implications effectively anticipated. Centres such as ACDESS serve as reliable indigenous think-tanks that are essential for policy management in our countries. After all, our Governments do spend millions of dollars every year in contracting experts from foreign consultancy firms who may not be fully acquainted with African realities.

Our experience at the Organization of African Unity has revealed that the urgency and magnitude of the challenges facing our Continent are quite overwhelming for those of us who have been entrusted with the responsibility of executing policies by pursuing goals and objectives, responding to demands, and delivering outcomes. Quite often, we neither have the time nor the facilities for deeper technical analysis and an exploration of prescriptive options. It is therefore important to have the ACDESS type of institutions that are devoted wholly to pursuing strategic studies and which can work closely with policy practitioners.

Furthermore, it is definitely more cost-effective to concentrate resources at national, regional and continental levels in specialized institutions that can optimize the deployment of expertise and facilities. Most of the Research and Development units at the level of national governments and secretariats of multilateral institutions tend to have a higher unit cost in their operations and often suffer from staff shortages and inadequacy of funds. In this respect, a collaborative relationship between centres of development studies and institutions of public policy can enhance capacities for coping with the

multiple challenges facing our continent and can definitely generate more effective outcomes.

I should hasten to state at this juncture that in taking up all these tasks, ACDESS, as a non-governmental centre for policy and strategic studies, has a unique advantage. The multifaceted experience of its Executive Director and the wide range of positions some of his collaborators have served in can help in addressing the often-problematic nature of policy – research nexus.

In most of our societies, scholarly studies and research results do not interface effectively with the process of policy management. While it is not uncommon for scholars and researchers to be dubbed as excessively theoretical or being preoccupied with issues of little societal relevance, the policy managers are sometimes considered by scholars to be simplistically technocratic, lacking in rigour, and devoid of comprehensiveness. This unhealthy relationship has forestalled a meaningful discourse between policy and research, a situation whose consequence has only been negative to the development of this Continent. I am confident that ACDESS, as seen from the partnership it has developed in its initial decade of operations, will continue to bridge the dysfunctional linkage that may exist between the research and scholarly community and the managers of the policy process.

Let me conclude by once again wishing Professor Adedeji good health, happiness and a continuing commitment to the people of Africa. To his colleagues in ACDESS I would like to urge them to keep up the good work their institution is doing for this Continent. We at the OAU will continue to work with them closely in pursuing our common interests.

I thank you.