



Organization of African Unity

**THIRD AFRO-ARAB TRADE FAIR
6 - 12 DECEMBER 1997
SHARJAH, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim
Secretary General of the Organization of
African Unity (OAU) on the occasion
of the official opening of the
Third Afro-Arab Trade Fair**

- **Your Highness, Dr. Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohamed Al Qassimi,
Ruler of Sharjah and Member of the Supreme Council
of the United Arab Emirates,**
- **Honourable Ministers,**
- **Distinguished Ambassadors,**
- **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honour and privilege for me to address you today on the occasion of the official inauguration of the Third Afro-Arab Trade Fair by His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohamed Al Qassimi, the ruler of Sharjah.

At the very outset, on behalf of the Organization of African Unity, I would like to thank and commend the Emirate of Sharjah, the Federal Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sharjah, for the efforts they have made for the convening of this event in the most propitious conditions. We are grateful for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us all since our arrival in the friendly and fraternal Emirates of Sharjah. I am particularly delighted that this Trade Fair is being held in Sharjah for I am keenly aware of the personal commitment of His Highness, Dr. Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi to the promotion of understanding and close cooperation between the Africa and Arab peoples.

I would also like to put on record my appreciation to the African and Arab Ministers, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, economic operators, businessmen and women, as well as representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, African, Arab and International specialized agencies who have kindly accepted to participate in this event.

The First Afro-Arab Trade Fair was held in Tunis, Tunisia in 1993 and was followed by the Second one in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1995. Today, as we inaugurate the Third Afro-Arab Trade Fair here in Sharjah, we take comfort in the growing success and importance of these Trade Fairs. They also represent a testimony to the commitment of our countries to the strengthening of the Afro-Arab Cooperation.

This Afro-Arab Trade Fair is being held at a crucial time of the international economic and trade relations which are marked by a speedy movement towards the globalization and liberalization of the economy based on highly competitive rules. This is the time, therefore, where all the opportunities for cooperation and making business need to be seriously explored in order to maximize our chances for economic progress in this new and difficult economic environment.

African Arab Cooperation which is deep rooted in our common historical and cultural heritage provides clearly the most appropriate basis for promoting economic and trade relations based on mutual interest. Afro-Arab trade

which is today very modest offers great potential for development. Our respective countries should view this as both a challenge and an opportunity.

The current Afro-Arab Trade Fair should, therefore, facilitate direct contacts between African and Arab businessmen. It should also provide the opportunity to underscore the important role that the public and private sectors should, henceforth, play in the promotion of investments and trade activities between the two regions. In this respect, priority should be given to the exchange of information and investment opportunities.

**Your Highness,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As you are all aware, Africa is very rich with natural resources. What is urgently needed are investments to develop, transform and make use of these resources to satisfy the needs of our peoples and improve their living conditions. Such investments will clearly also be providing significant returns for those who invest. In this context, investments from Arab countries are most welcome.

I would like, in this regard, to stress the fact that Africa is increasingly opening to business. African States are adopting enabling policies for business. They are taking measures to attract foreign investments. Of no less importance, the leaders of African countries are determined to create the conditions

for peace, security and stability which are essential for attracting investments. The issue of peace, security and stability in the Continent has become the top priority agenda of the Organization of African Unity. We are very conscious of the fact that there cannot be meaningful development in the Continent in an atmosphere devoid of peace, security and stability. That is why, over the last years, our Continental Organization has been promoting and supporting efforts aimed at addressing the scourge of conflicts in Africa. We have not been able to achieve success every where but, on the whole, I am of the view that we are making significant progress.

I am convinced that given the firm determination, of our Governments and peoples, Africa will emerge as a Continent with a difference, a Continent with formidable opportunities for development and business. The Economic operators of the Arab World who know Africa and Africans should be at the fore front in making use of the great potential that exists and the unlimited opportunities for cooperative interaction to the benefit of both the African and Arab peoples.

I hope that this challenge will be at the core of the discussions during the Cooperation Forum which is being held on the occasion of this Fair. I am also confident that the presence of many African and Arab Ministers, high ranking officials and businessmen will enable the establishment of direct contacts between

African and Arab partners. I invite them all to take business and cooperation

seriously and to consider Africa as the land of opportunities for serious business and cooperation.

The African and Arab peoples are bound by solid ties of history, culture and geography. We should do everything within our means to consolidate and strengthen further these relations by giving them a concrete and economic dimension. This is the challenge before us. I want to assure you of the OAU's continued commitment and support in this important endeavour towards greater rapprochement and cooperation between our peoples.

Finally, I would like, on behalf of the OAU and all its Member States to thank, once again, the Emirate of Sharjah for the efforts made to make this event a real success. I wish in particular to express my gratitude and pay tribute to you, Your Highness, for the personal interest and invaluable support you have given to ensure the success of this Third Afro-Arab Trade Fair. Your Highness's presence in our midst to give this occasion as well as your wise counsel is highly appreciated. Once again, I thank you, Your Highness, for having graced, by your presence, this ceremony which you have kindly accepted to open personally.

I thank you.