

(11)

MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU
ON THE OCCASION OF THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD

16 JUNE 1991

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

TODAY IS A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE AFRICAN CHILDREN OF SOWETO WHO ROSE UP AGAINST INJUSTICE AND THE INHUMAN SYSTEM OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA.

ON 16 JUNE 1976, THE CHILDREN OF SOWETO REMINDED THE PRETORIA REGIME AND DREW THE ATTENTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO THE FACT THAT THEY WERE NOT SUB-HUMANS AS THE APARTHEID REGIME SOUGHT TO TREAT THEM. THROUGH THEIR RESISTANCE AND SACRIFICES THE CHILDREN OF SOWETO AFFIRMED THEIR RIGHT TO PEACE, JUSTICE, EDUCATION AND CULTURE.

TODAY, WE ALSO COMMEMORATE THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD IN CONFORMITY WITH THE DECISION OF THE 26TH ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF OUR ORGANIZATION. TODAY, AS WE COMMEMORATE THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD, WE SHOULD REDEDICATE OURSELVES TO A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS, BOTH INTERNAL AND INTER-STATE.

INDEED, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH NATION TO SAFEGUARD ITS FUTURE BY PROTECTING ITS CHILDREN. IT IS ALSO THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AFRICA TO SAFEGUARD ITS FUTURE BY PROTECTING ITS CHILDREN.

THE FACT IS TODAY, THIS FUTURE IS THREATENED BY THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION OF OUR CONTINENT.

THE WORLD ECONOMIC RECESSION HAS HAD TRAGIC REPERCUSSIONS ON OUR PEOPLE, MOST OF WHOM WALLOW IN HUNGER AND MISERY; GROAN UNDER STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES THAT ARE COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS OF OUR SITUATION AND OPERATE

IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF SOCIAL CRISIS. THE EXTERNAL DEBT BURDEN AGGRAVATED BY THE DECLINE IN COMMODITY PRICES HAS FURTHER COMPOUNDED AN ALREADY TRAGIC SITUATION. AND, AS IF THESE WERE NOT ENOUGH, DROUGHT, LOCUST MIGRATION, SOIL EROSION, DEFORESTATION, EXCESSIVE GRAZING, IN SHORT ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION HAVE ADDED ON TO THIS ALREADY BLEAK PICTURE. ABOVE ALL THE PERENNIAL CIVIL STRIFE IN MANY OF OUR SOCIETIES HAVE IMMENSELY COMPLICATED THE ALREADY DISMAL PICTURE FACING MANY OF THE CONTINENT'S CHILDREN.

IT IS ALSO TRUE HOWEVER THAT AFRICA, THROUGH ITS POLITICAL DETERMINATION AND THE SENSITIZATION AND MOBILIZATION OF SOCIETY, HAS SUCCEEDED IN SOME AREAS, SUCH AS UNIVERSAL IMMUNIZATION.

THERE IS EVERY CAUSE TO HOPE THAT IN SPITE OF ITS DIFFICULTIES AFRICA CAN PROTECT ITS CHILDREN: THAT THROUGH THE NEW METHODS DEvised BY AND FOR IT IN ANSWER TO ITS BASIC NEEDS, IT CAN IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELL BEING OF ITS CHILDREN.

AFRICA IS THEREFORE AT A CROSS-ROADS TODAY. IT HAS A MAJOR CHALLENGE TO FACE, NAMELY THAT OF GUARANTEEING THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ITS CHILDREN.

EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT IT IS POSSIBLE. LET US THEREFORE SHOW THAT AS FAR AS OUR CHILDREN ARE CONCERNED, WE ARE PREPARED TO GO RIGHT TO THE END IN PROMOTING THEIR RIGHTS TO GOOD HEALTH, FOOD AND EDUCATION.

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS END, AFRICA AS A WHOLE HAS TO HARNESS ITS NATURAL AND MANPOWER RESOURCES IN ORDER TO

GUARANTEE FOOD SELF-EFFICIENCY, ENSURE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE DELIVERY AND EDUCATION FOR ALL. THESE THREE ELEMENTS SHOULD STAND OUT AS THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE SO AS TO BREAK THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF DEPENDENCE, ILLITERACY AND DISEASE IN WHICH OUR CONTINENT FINDS ITSELF. IT IS NECESSARY TO ENHANCE THE ROLE OF WOMEN AS THE MAIN AGENTS OF FOOD PRODUCTION IN AFRICA AND ALSO AS MOTHERS AND AS THOSE MAINLY IN CHARGE OF TAKING CARE OF THE CHILDREN. THIS IN TURN WILL REFLECT ON THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF A COUNTRY BECAUSE INFANT MORTALITY AND MALNUTRITION RATES ARE NOTHING BUT A PORTRAYAL OF UNDER-DEVELOPMENT. AFRICA HAS THE TOOLS. THEIR USE WILL HELP TO CONSIDERABLY IMPROVE THE STATUS OF OUR CHILDREN.

IT IS FOR THESE CHILDREN, THEIR HARMONIOUS DEVELOPMENT BOTH PHYSICAL AND MORAL, THEIR SECURITY AND WELL BEING THAT THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY CALLS ON EVERYONE TO MOBILIZE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY.

FINALLY, AS WE COMMEMORATE THIS DAY - THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD, IT IS ENCOURAGING TO NOTE THE ALMOST UNIVERSAL CONCERN DEMONSTRATED FOR OUR CHILDREN.

EVERYWHERE POLITICIANS, FAMOUS ARTISTS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, PARLIAMENTARIANS, INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS AND MEN AND WOMEN OF GOOD WILL HAVE POOLED THEIR EFFORTS IN A GLOBAL COALITION TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF THE AFRICAN CHILD. I WOULD LIKE TO SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PAY TRIBUTE TO ALL THOSE INVOLVED IN THE LOFTY TASK OF PROTECTING AFRICAN CHILDREN AND MORE SPECIFICALLY UNICEF FOR THE IMPORTANT ROLE IT PLAYS IN THIS RESPECT.