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EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION
OF AFRICAN UNITY TO THE UNITED NATIONS

346 EAST 50TH STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

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OAU PRESS RELEASE NO. NY/OAU/BUR/6/92

MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU
H. E. SALIM AHMED SALIM
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OAU DAY

MAY 25, 1992

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Twenty-nine years ago, leaders of thirty-two independent countries of Africa convened in Addis Ababa, and decided to create the Organization of African Unity. The decision was a milestone for the continent. Africa, emerging from colonial bondage, had decided to take its destiny in its own hands. We can now look back with justifiable pride at the achievements made. The Organization of African Unity turned out to be an important instrument for political emancipation of many of our countries. It has also served as a central forum for policy coordination among them and played a key role in enabling our continent emerge as a positive force on the international political and diplomatic scene.

Today, the ranks of independent African countries have swelled to fifty-one and apart from the unfinished business of dismantling apartheid in South Africa, the continent is basically free. This is not a small achievement considering especially the monumental sacrifices and the bitter wars of independence which had to be waged. In South Africa, we are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel.

We have been encouraged by the progress in the negotiations within the codesa framework on the future of South Africa. Notwithstanding the limitations of the codesa framework, we take heart at the fact that, for the first time, South Africans of all races have come together in a coalition for change in their

country. We owe it to them to provide the necessary support and encouragement to sustain the momentum of negotiations which has been triggered by developments over the last two years culminating in the codesa process. Of course, the international community must continue to be vigilant and to exert the necessary pressure on Mr. De Klerk so as to ensure that the process of negotiations now underway takes root and that nothing is done to undermine or reverse it.

Of course, the debate on how to handle relations with the South African Government during this period of transition, is still continuing. At the root of this debate is the view that, in recognition of the progress towards the dismantling of Apartheid, which has taken place, Africa should be prepared to adjust its position accordingly. The Organization of African Unity, in recognition of those changes, has already decided to resume the People to People contacts. It has, however, repeatedly declared that, unless and until the process of dismantling apartheid has reached the point of irreversibility, pressure should continue to be exerted against South Africa as a way of speeding up the pace of change.

Meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, recently, the Ad Hoc Committee on Southern Africa, acting on behalf of all OAU Member States, decided that the formation and installation of the Interim Government will be the benchmark. At that stage, the point of irreversibility will have been reached and Africa will have no reason to continue isolating that country. While we look forward to that eventuality, we must continue to call for the unity of the black majority at this crucial juncture of the struggle and for the speedy end to violence in the black townships.

Anniversaries are occasions of rejoicing and reflection. As we rejoice at the monumental achievements in the field of decolonization and at the encouraging developments in South Africa, we are painfully conscious of the severe economic problems facing the continent notwithstanding the marginal levels of growth recorded in the last couple of years.

The economic crisis, over the last decade, threatens to undo entirely the social gains made in the sixties and seventies when Africa achieved appreciable growth. A host of external factors combined to wreak havoc to the economies of the continent. The deterioration of the terms of trade, the collapse of

the commodity prices, the contraction in aid and flow of concessionary resources to Africa, compounded by the huge burden of external indebtedness, have collectively placed unbearable strain upon the economies of all of our countries. The result is that our people are slipping into deeper poverty and our countries increasingly unable to embark on development.

Quite apart from the factors of the hostile international economic environment in which Africa is compelled to operate, there have admittedly been internal factors as well. Policy and human failures, in our countries, have also contributed to our present economic situation. Policy experimentation, stagnated economic activity and lack of people-centered development policies stifled initiative, creativity and industry of our people. In addition, conflicts, both within and between states, have gobbled a sizable part of the energy and resources of our continent not to speak of the attendant loss of life, destruction of property and infrastructure as well as of the engaging problem of refugees and displaced persons now wandering across our lands in search of refuge and succour.

Saddled with these problems, Africa has not succumbed to despondency or despair. Instead, there has been an awakening all across the continent to the fact that Africa must re seize the initiative and apply itself with renewed determination and vigour to the resolution of these problems. Integral to this awakening is a realization that individually, the African countries cannot possibly find solutions to these problems. It is only through unity of purpose and action, built upon the firm foundations of common interest, that the continent can elaborate comprehensive strategies to deal with these problems. Central also to this new thinking is the realization that, in the world of the future, it will be the larger and more integrated entities which will compete effectively. Whether in matters of the economy, ending conflicts, democratization, protecting human rights or finding solutions to the source of refugees, there is now, in clear evidence in Africa, a determination to strive and to achieve.

Internally, African countries have begun putting in place the kind of economic policies aimed at halting economic decline, ensuring recovery and spurring growth. Structural adjustment programs have been instituted often at great social cost and political risk. These, our leaders have chosen to do, in spite of their implications, in order to meet the immediate needs of stabilization and to build the foundation of

the bridge to investing in long-term development in the people. While we are far from coming out of the woods, signs of hope are beginning to manifest themselves. Imaginative and creative economic policies have, largely, stemmed economic decline and modest growth is gradually being restored to the economies of many of our countries.

After an average of thirty years of independence, our countries have come of age, and despite the cynicism of the detractors of our continent, we have been able to build nations from the rubble of colonialism. This has been accomplished against many odds and, like elsewhere in the world, the process of consolidating our nations will be a continuous one. The debate on how to manage this process of consolidation has now given rise to a spirited discussion in the continent on issues of democracy and governance.

There is now a definite realization in the continent that, in order to face the challenges of economic recovery, to resolve conflicts within nations and provide sound foundations for steady growth and development, the central issue of governance must be dealt with. In July 1990, at their Twenty-Sixth Summit Session in Addis Ababa, the leaders of Africa, in a declaration on the political and socio-economic situation in Africa and the fundamental changes taking place in the world, pledged themselves to the further democratization of their societies and to the consolidation of democratic institutions in their countries. This pledge was rooted in the firm conviction of our leaders that a permitting political environment, which guarantees human rights and equality before the law, would ensure accountability of those who govern. Promoting popular participation, situating the people at the centre of decision-making processes and empowering them is now a-pace in the continent.

A lot remains to be done to achieve transparency in government and to weave the essential attributes of democracy, integrally into the political fabric of our societies. Yet, we are applying our energies and making steady progress and, we should do so if we are to ward off international criticism and pressure. We must, therefore, internalize the process of democratization in our countries, insisting, at the same

time, that the peculiar circumstances of our societies, our traditions, culture and values are taken into account in that process of consolidating democracy. We must build democratic institutions based on the demands of our societies and not on command from outside.

The process of democratization requires that adjustments be made to respond to the needs of change in our countries. Our challenge is to ensure that the process of transition to political pluralism, now in progress throughout the continent is effected in an orderly manner so as not to undermine the national gains already made. Change and continuity must be pursued in tandem and made to interact positively in that process of transition. At the OAU, we are encouraged at the determination, in many countries, to carry out smooth transition and are happy to have been associated in managing the transition. We were happy to have been invited to observe elections in Comoros, Cape Verde, Benin, Mali and we look forward to doing the same in Ethiopia, Congo, Togo and Zaire.

In Abuja, Nigeria, in June, last year, the leaders of Africa adopted the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. It was also a landmark decision signalling the beginning of the second phase of the liberation of the continent and the culmination of the journey begun in 1980 with the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action and its Final Act. The signing of the Treaty was a political event, embodying the common resolve of our countries to embark on the integration of the continent. An integrated Africa will offer advantages of the economies of scale and facilitate diversification - both key issues in the future economic performance of the continent. Even without their weakness and vulnerability, our individual African countries cannot afford to stand alone. We see European countries with less urgent need for integration, working relentlessly towards continental union. It is a realization that, in the current trend of globalization, it is the larger entities which will withstand the economic vagaries of competition on a global scale. For Africa to emerge from the margins of the World Economic System, all our countries need each other and to speak in one voice and operate together. Economic integration is no longer a convenience of politics but an exigence of our shared needs. We must pursue it with vigour.

While we are inspired by the adoption of the Abuja Treaty, a lot must be done to make the goal of integration a living reality bringing our peoples in a continental partnership for progress. For beyond the signature and ratification of the Treaty, we must

ensure that it is popularized so that our people feel they have a stake in their future and a central role to play in the integration of the continent. For in the final analysis, it will not be a community of goods but of people.

As we deploy collective efforts to bring about further democratization of our societies, to build democratic institutions, in our countries, and to work towards integration on the basis of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, we do so in the keen knowledge that we cannot achieve these objectives unless we deal conclusively with the scourge of conflicts which are now bleeding our continent. Conflicts, both within and between our countries, has bled the continent of massive resources and resulted in destruction of lives, property and infrastructure and rendered millions refugees or displaced. The OAU has continually exerted itself to the resolution of these conflicts even if, at times, with reluctance from member states.

There is now a qualitative change in the outlook of member states on how the organization should view conflicts and what role it should play. In addition to the declaration of member states to deploy concerted efforts at finding solutions to conflicts, there is now a recognition that the OAU has a view on conflicts and role to play in assisting in their resolution. This new thinking and disposition, on the part of Member States, had made the need of a formal framework of resolving conflicts more urgent. For the lack of an established mechanism to backstop the efforts of the Secretary-General has been a further impediment to the resolution of conflicts. We need now a mechanism which would enable the OAU to respond swiftly and decisively to conflict situations on the continent. It is my hope that the next summit in Dakar this coming June will provide an opportunity to exchange views on how such a mechanism could be set up and deployed it's nature and scope of operation.

Several specific conflicts on the continent continue to demand urgent response. We are, however, encouraged by the developments in the Senegal/Mauritania conflict. The normalization of relations between the two sisterly republics set forth the momentum for a lasting settlement of their differences. I commend the leaders of the two countries for the leadership they have provided and urge their common efforts.

The situation in Somalia remains a source of deep concern. The carnage and mayhem which visited Somalia did not speak well of our continent. While we take heart at the holding of the ceasefire, brokered by the UN, the OAU, the League of Arab States and the Islamic Conference as well as the commencement of moving humanitarian supplies to the embattled population of Mogadishio, the long-term peace, security and stability of the country must be of equal concern to us all.

The situation in Somalia is inextricably linked to the problems of the Horn of Africa. I have been encouraged by an equal realization on the part of the countries of the region and their determination to work together in tackling the myriad of problems facing the region. The recent international humanitarian conference on the Horn of Africa, held in Addis Ababa, marked a good beginning which must be consolidated and expanded. For it is only by restoring peace and stability that the region can harness its full energies and direct them to the resolution of the problems of refugees, drought and famine which threaten to ravage the millions there.

As we stand at the threshold of the thirtieth anniversary of our organization, we must also reflect on the looming disaster in many countries in Southern Africa and in the Horn. A drought of unprecedented magnitude has engulfed these parts threatening the lives of millions. I wish to take this opportunity to urgently appeal for emergency food supplies to the affected countries. At the same time, this crisis must sensitize us all to the need, in future, to work towards food self-sufficiency and food security generally including setting up joint regional strategic food reserves.

The OAU, like any dynamic institution, is constantly adjusting to change in Africa and the world. We must keep abreast with time to remain relevant to respond to the expectations of the people of Africa whom we serve. The organization has been criticized, sometimes fairly and sometimes unfairly. What is encouraging in all these criticisms is that they are rooted in the good belief that the Organization ought to do more. These are healthy and welcome criticisms because they are based on the immense expectation of our people from the organization and the sincere belief that it can do more. While it is not possible always

to make public the many efforts deployed quietly in search of solution to the many problems facing the continent, we can confidently say that we have made important achievements. Together, the people and governments of Africa and the OAU must now forge a common platform and march to a brighter tomorrow.

New York, 22 May, 1992

