

**STATEMENT BY H.E.
DR SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
ORGANISATION OF
AFRICAN UNITY (OAU).**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
OPENING OF THE
PAN-AFRICAN YOUTH CONGRESS.**

**ALGIERS,
ALGERIA, 1 SEPTEMBER, 1996**

Mr Chairman,

Your Excellency, Mr Liamine Zeroual, President of the Democratic Republic of Algeria,

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Mr Hamdoun Issebere, Secretary-General of the Pan-African Youth Movement, Representatives of Youth Organisations and NGOs,

Invited Guests and Observers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a singular honour and pleasure for me to address the formal opening of this august Assembly on the occasion of the Eighth Congress of the Pan-African Youth Congress in this beautiful and historic city of Algiers, Headquarters of our Pan-African Youth Organisation. I am particularly happy that this Eighth Pan-African Youth congress is not only singularly devoted to the issues and problems of critical concern to the youth of our continent and to the role and contribution of African Youth in meeting the current challenges facing the Youth, but also and more importantly, the fact that the Congress will be an opportune moment to critically examine the role, relevance, mission, purpose or aims and objectives, functions and functioning and orientation of the Pan-African Youth Movement and the importance of attuning our Youth Movement to the current socio-economic, political and cultural context of our Continent.

Before I proceed any further, I wish to pay deferential tribute to the Government and people of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria for the warm welcome and traditional African hospitality that has been accorded to the OAU delegation and other delegations since our arrival on Algerian soil. May

I also take this opportunity to thank the Government of Algeria for not only hosting the Eight Pan-African Youth Congress but also the Pan-African Youth Movement in Algiers since its inception 34 years ago.

Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Youth may be defined as all persons within the age range of 15 to 24 years. Obviously, they constitute a special target group in Africa's socio-economic development. At present, there are approximately 122 million youth on our African Continent, constituting about 19 per cent of the total African population. Even the projections of population growth into the forthcoming century indicate that the proportion of young persons, between 15 and 24, in relation to the overall population, will continue to grow over the next 30 years from 19 to 21 per cent by the year 2025.

The above statistics clearly demonstrate that Africa is caught in the generation change. Equipped with a viable Youth power, the youths on our Continent must be given the machinery and mechanism to dream their own dreams. The implications of this demographic situation for the provision, by African countries, of primary, secondary, vocational, technical and higher education opportunities to millions more youths in the years ahead are serious. Jobs, housing, health and other social services will also have to be increased to meet the monumental growth in demand. Thus, youth population growth of this magnitude requires that appropriate measures be embarked upon to

anticipate and respond, in a timely manner, to the demands which such growth will create.

This Congress is taking place at a critical juncture of Africa's socio-economic and political history, whereby the social impact of the recession and indeed the depression has been devastating for the African population as a whole and the youth in particular for whom the measures taken so far to alleviate or solve their problems have been insufficient and have had little impact on their problems, concerns and needs. Given the numerical importance and the special vulnerability of the youth, they should be adequately empowered to assume their rightful role in the socio-economic transformation and development of the African continent as it prepares to enter into the Second Millennium. It therefore behoves all concerned to take concerted action - African Governments, the private sector and institutions, NGOs and youth organisations themselves to provide Africa's youth with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as the opportunities for engagement in productive activities, given that the youth constitute an important human resource in every country. The development of their socio-economic potential is hence a cornerstone to Africa's sustainable development.

We in the OAU remember, with pride, that the political revolution which Africa witnessed in the 1950s and 1960s and which ushered in the glorious era of independence, was championed and fostered by African youth of those years, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Seretse Khama, Jomo Kenyatta, Obafemi Awolowo, Nandi Azikiwe, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Patrice Lumumba, Ahmed Ben Bella and his militant companions, Habib Bourguiba, Gamal Abdel Nasser,

Muammah Gaddhaffi, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, to name only a few. These were already household names when these leaders were in their early 30s. They were visionaries who believed that Africa could and had to be free and set about leading their people to freedom. The fight against colonialism was indeed only a battle in the war we in this day and age still continue to prosecute. The battle for economic liberation is still to be won and it is the Youth of this continent who should shoulder the full responsibility for its execution. If Africa is ever to bring about the willed future that we in the OAU are fond of talking about, the youth have a crucial, pivotal and decisive role to play in that battle. After all, no one can deny the fact that the youth have the energy and the creative ability and can, with determination and proper guidance, develop the enthusiasm and dynamism that are indispensable elements for turning our present economic tide. Youths, in the chapter of any history, want an independence of vision; they want new ideas and new programmes that reflect the realities of the continent. It is my conviction that Youths must be seen to be responsible and mature persons who can lead their countries through pragmatic policies, whether they are revolutionary or evolutionary, whether gradual or radical.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The convening of the Congress was announced during the First Pan-African Conference on Youth and Development that was itself held under the auspices of the OAU in March this year. Although I was unable, owing to prior commitments, to address the opening of that Conference, I had the opportunity to deliver a statement at the closure of the Conference. The Pan-African

Conference on Youth reviewed and exchanged experiences and expertise on the actual and potential role that the youth can and should play as well as their contribution to the implementation of their national development plans, the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community; the African Charter on Human and People's Rights; and the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa. The theme of the Conference was - African Youth in the 1990s and Beyond: Peace, Participation and Development. The outcome of the Pan-African Conference and the Youth Forum were a set of recommendations which we submitted to the recent Sessions of the OAU Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, respectively for adoption and endorsement.

It is pertinent that I highlight the fact that the Pan-African Conference on Youth noted with concern that today, compared to 1985 when the International Year of Youth was proclaimed, the economic performance of African economies and the living conditions of Africans have worsened as evidenced by the sad facts that: unemployment and underemployment among the youth has worsened and youth constitute 60 to 70 per cent of the unemployed in Africa, and unemployment among university graduates is on the increase. Girls and young women, in particular, are more likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts; Rural-urban migration of young people is on the increase, thus increasing the imbalance between urban and rural areas, swelling the labour supply, while draining the countryside of valuable human capacity for development.

Lack of relevant skills and training, lack or shortage of start-up capital and credit, and absence of clear and well articulated policies on youth employment have exacerbated the problem of youth unemployment and underemployment in our African countries.

Although African youth are a vast resource to be potentially and optimally utilised, yet Africa's poor socio-economic base and performance cannot now provide adequate educational opportunities for African youth to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to empower them to contribute to their societies' economic, social, cultural and political development. Africa's socio-economic development will largely depend on the acquisition of the badly needed skill-base of science and technology. Much therefore needs to be done to improve the teaching and skill-acquisition of these neglected knowledge areas. Although Africa has the largest share of world reserves of natural resources, inadequate indigenous scientific and technological capability and know-how will continue to arrest and adversely affect the efficient utilisation of these resources for accelerated socio-economic development. At present, Africa has the lowest number of scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per million inhabitants.

Another area of challenge for African Youth in the education sphere is that of agriculture and attainment of self-sufficiency in food production. Unfortunately, enrolment in agricultural disciplines is still dismally low. The level of development of agricultural research is still so limited that African farmers benefit very little, if at all, from the knowledge gained. Hence, the need for more practical and inter-disciplinary research in agriculture and agro-

related industries.

In order to bring tangible relief to the depressed rural areas, agricultural education needs to broaden its scope to include subject areas relevant to the African farmers. The African farmer must be enabled to increase productivity, and implement rural industrialisation. Farmers, entrepreneurs and investors must therefore be included in the education process since they have a great deal of valuable knowledge to offer; and learning should become a two-way process between higher education institutes on the one hand and rural farmers and local people on the other.

How then can the African youth achieve the socio-economic, scientific and technological breakthrough which our leaders achieved in the political field three decades or so ago. For Africa to achieve the socio-economic revolution, it must completely decolonise its economy and for Africa to be able to do that, factor inputs must become over the years, overwhelmingly native and indigenous. The entrepreneurs and the innovators, the scientists and the technologists, the investors and the managers as well as the captains of industry must be predominantly African. The youth as the leaders of tomorrow will in all these capacities, be the ones who will implement the five stages of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. I have underscored the importance of capacity-building or development planning and utilisation of Africa's young human resources as a potential resource that should be given all the opportunities in order to develop optimally all their capabilities. In order to hasten regional and economic integration, which to us in the OAU must be achieved if Africa is ever to participate meaningfully in the global economy,

African youth must be given all the opportunities of taking course offerings that are critical to Africa's socio-economic development such as science, engineering, agriculture, medicine and management.

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are all aware, Africa's development burden is compounded by the scourge of escalating intra-state violent conflicts. Thus, in the period 1960 to 1993 alone, Africa witnessed no less than 24 conflicts and currently a number of conflicts are still raging and thus draining the continent of its precious population and destroying infrastructure. These wars and conflicts are a big drain on the scarce financial and human resources that Africa can ill afford to lose. As a result of these fratricidal conflicts, as exemplified in Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the number of refugees in our continent is highest, totalling some 7 million while the internally displaced persons number over 18 million. This is a painful reality, but it is a measure of the level of human and material destruction that stalks the African continent today. As a result of these conflicts, it is the women, the children and the youth who bear the brunt of all these wars and civil strife.

The implications of these conflicts are that young people have been forced to the centre of many of Africa's internal conflicts, as fighters, perpetrators or victims. The proliferation of orphanages and disability or rehabilitation centres testifies to the plight of hundreds of thousands of youth and children across our continent, some of whom are growing up as homeless and street youth. Many pupils have been forced to drop out of school and take

up arms while many more have been uprooted from their families. Young people must be vigilant and be vocal about national policies and programmes that might be opposed to the process of change towards democracy, democratisation, good governance, probity, accountability and transparency. African countries in close consultation with their national youth organisations need to develop appropriate mechanisms for enhancing and mobilising the active and constructive participation of youth in evolving democratic institutions, in peace building, reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The scourge of drug abuse and trafficking among African youth is of grave concern in many African countries. The scourge is expanding as a number of African countries serve as production and transit points. African youth are being used by drug barons as couriers and traffickers, smuggling drugs to Western Europe and North America. It is encouraging

that in combating the rapid growth of abuse and trafficking of drugs, our Heads of State and Government have recently adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action on "Drug Control Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking in Africa." They have thus committed themselves to produce a framework for drug control; to make adequate budgetary allocation for controlling narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and mobilise and develop adequate human resources to combat the scourge. We are therefore confident that if the problem is tackled at family, national, regional and continental levels, much progress will be made in eradicating the scourge of drugs from our beloved continent.

In the health sector, of grave concern is that young Africans are not receiving adequate information or practical assistance for the protection of their health and health services are not attuned to the special needs of adolescent youth. As a result, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, early pregnancies, genetic and congenital diseases, psychological and mental diseases as well as malnutrition are among the common diseases affecting the youth. Particular mention must be made of the HIV/AIDS pandemic which continues to have an adverse impact on socio-economic development since the youth, who are the bulk of the labour force in both the urban and rural areas, are the most vulnerable group. Our African Leaders have adopted the "Tunis Declaration on AIDS and Child in Africa in June, 1994 in which they committed themselves to elaborate a national policy framework to guide and support appropriate responses to the needs of affected children covering social, legal, ethical, medical and human rights issues.

Africa has now become basically a free continent following the eradication of apartheid. Africa, and particularly the youth of Africa, now have to face a series of challenges related to the qualitative transformation of our continent. Indeed, beyond the struggle for the political liberation of Africa, we now need to focus on the future and ask ourselves what future for Africa? In response to this question, you the Youth of Africa, should not only rely on what your respective Member States can do or on what Governments can do for you. The principal concern should and must be what you the youth yourselves can do to make a meaningful impact on the current situation of the continent in all sectors, including, for instance, the improvement of the quality of life of our people; the standard of education, particularly in cases where it is quite clear

that Governments and Member States are experiencing serious difficulties in providing suitable education for the youth who are the future of the continent. The future of Africa, as you are aware, will largely depend on how prepared our African youth are and how equipped they will be to face the global challenges confronting our continent.

Following the political struggle, our continent and its peoples achieved freedom. The challenge now is how to consolidate such hard-won freedom in the face of a phenomenon of escalating conflicts which are bleeding the continent and depleting our resources. The central question then becomes how to tackle all hotbeds of tension and conflict simmering in our continent where, in some instances, our youth are used as boy or girl soldiers. In order to tackle the scourge of conflict in our continent, this Congress should seriously consider implementing the Recommendation on Peace Education at the village level, in our primary and secondary schools and other institutions of higher learning in order to develop and inculcate in our youth a culture of peace and tolerance. You should endeavour to determine how your Congress can be a vehicle for promoting change, fighting for moderation as you strive to inculcate a culture of peace. You should use the mosaic of diversity as a source of strength.

Other challenges, beyond war and conflicts, face our youth. For instance, how can our youth exert enough pressure to bear on Governments to ensure that policies are influenced with a view to improving the living conditions of our people and enhancing the situation of the continent. How can and should our youth adapt to modern technology and stand up to any attempt to marginalise

our people. How can the youth confront or combat the spectre of Afro-pessimism? How can the youth ensure that the cradle of civilisation and mankind does not become the lost continent on earth? These are the challenges. Beyond these, how can the youth ensure, in our respective countries, that there is respect for democracy, rule of law, respect and protection of human rights and the establishment of good governance, transparency, probity and accountability? How can youth pressure be brought to bear in the fight against corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, tribalism, regionalism and religious fanaticism against people of different beliefs which now seem to be endemic and poised to break the socio-political fabric of our communities? Africa fought for freedom. It is important for this freedom to be sustained and for human rights to be guaranteed. In this area, as in others, the youth have a leading role to play.

As I see it, the holding of this Congress is auspicious and timely in that it brings to the fore the challenges that our continent and its youth have to face. You as the youth of Africa need to exert pressure in pursuit of these challenges: pressure on your respective Governments, within your national, regional, student and continental youth organisations; pressure on regional and continental organisations to face up to these challenges and achieve these objectives.

When I talk about the youth, I am referring to the young men and women, and particularly to the young women, who have made such a major contribution to the continent but who by and large, are under-privileged, discriminated against and marginalised. The challenge is therefore how we can collectively

change this image and the image of a continent that is identified with drought, famine, civil strife, violence, coups and counter-coups. This is the challenge that now faces us all.

As I stated earlier, this is a Congress with a difference in that it is expected to critically examine the role, contribution, mission, structure, resources, purpose and aims and objectives, relevance, functions and functioning, effectiveness and orientation of the Pan-African Youth Movement (PYM) and the urgency of adapting our Pan-African Youth Movement to the current socio-economic, political and cultural context of our continent. The Youth Movement was established in 1962 by the Founding Fathers of the OAU in order to mobilise and channel the energies of the youth in participating fully in the development of the continent as responsible citizens. After 34 years of existence, the PYM is now well beyond maturity. It is now absolutely necessary to revisit the Statutes of the Movement with a view to revitalising, redynamising and rejuvenating the Movement's structures, functioning and its mission in order to bring it in line with the aspirations of our youth as we prepare to enter the 21st Century. This Congress may therefore wish to establish a Committee to study the issues affecting or likely to affect the effective functioning of the Pan-African Youth Movement.

At this juncture, I wish to reiterate the importance of the involvement and the participation of the youth in the field of social, economic, political, cultural, scientific and technological development of our continent. In saying so, I am convinced that ultimately the main challenge facing our continent is one of how to prepare and mobilise the formidable energies of our

youth to be able to play their rightful role in the next century. I have no doubt in my mind that if there were a revolution to achieve in our continent, the youth must be the main driving force. On our part, we in the OAU will continue to do our utmost to sensitise the policy and decision-making organs of the Organisation on the plight and aspirations of our youth in Africa. I shall personally make it a point to bring these aspirations, as would have been spelt out at this Congress, to

the attention of the subsequent Sessions of the Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

In making this pledge and exhortation to our youth, I am guided by the Monrovia Declaration adopted by our Heads of State and Government in 1979 whereby the African Leaders were desirous and I quote, of "Placing the younger element of our population foremost in our thoughts, helping them to become responsible citizens and respecting their responsibilities, encouraging their participation in decisions that concern them - this is how we can best work towards a change for progress in Africa. Ready for every sacrifice for which the need is profoundly felt, these young people also passionately aspire for peace. They demand that an end should be put to the violence from which our continent has suffered so much for centuries - slavery, forced labour, mercenaries for every war. They demand that our first item of expenditure should be expenditure on development in reason, economy and humanity."

Investment in youth is the only insurance policy for the Africa of the 21st Century. With that in mind, and in a spirit of commitment to social and

distributive justice, let us, one and all, use the occasion of this Congress to address the immense challenges before us, with an agenda for practical action.

I therefore feel that the discussion items before this august Congress is not only timely and pertinent in this respect. It is my sincere hope and conviction that this Congress will be crowned with fruitful conclusions mapping out the future direction of African Governments, national youth organisations, regional and continental organisations, and of the Pan-African Youth Movement, in particular, in addressing youth issues, problems and concerns for the benefit of African societies at large. I remain convinced that African Youths can triumph, the recent African demonstration at the Atlanta Centenary Olympics, when African Youths from South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria and Ethiopia, went for nothing other than gold, is a clear demonstration and a source of pride on what the Youths of this great Continent are capable of doing.

I wish you successful deliberations.