

BRIEF REMARKS BY H.E. SALIM A. SALIM, OAU SECRETARY GENERAL,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE AFRICAN REGIONAL
PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
PALAIS DE CARTHAGE (PRESIDENTIAL PALACE), TUNIS
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 02, 1992

Your Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe I am expressing the sentiments of all of us here present in conveying to you Mr. President, our profound thanks and appreciation for having had the time to receive us this morning. We consider this as a manifestation of the commitment of your government, your people and your own in support of the goals and objectives of the African Regional Conference on Human Rights.

Mr. President,

We are particularly gratified that this Regional Conference to prepare for the World Conference on Human Rights is being held in your beautiful capital city. Our satisfaction stems not only because of the traditional hospitality and generosity of the Tunisian people - which has again been clearly manifested to all of us since our arrival in Tunis. More important however, is our recognition of the important role which Tunisia has played and continues to play in our continent and beyond for the affirmation and respect for the dignity of man and the promotion of human understanding, transcending all artificial barriers and divisions. This country's historic role in the struggle against injustice and indignities in Africa, in the Arab world and the world at large makes Tunis an ideal setting for an encounter of this importance. I wish to pay tribute to you Mr. President and through Your Excellency

to the Government and people of Tunisia for hosting this conference, but above all for the commitment to the ideals which have brought us all to Tunis. This commitment is in the tradition of the struggle of the people of Tunisia for independence and liberty and their unflinching support of the struggle for freedom throughout our continent.

Mr. President,

The Organization of African Unity which I have the honour to represent attaches great importance to the holding of this Regional Conference. It is the first of its kind in the regional Meetings which are to prepare for the World Conference on Human Rights. It is our hope that Africa will set a positive tune for other regional meetings. I wish to pay tribute to the United Nations and especially to the Centre for Human Rights in organizing this conference. I wish also to express our appreciation for the support given by the United Nations in augmenting Africa's capacity and efforts in the field of human rights.

Mr. President,

Perhaps no continent and no people have experienced so much agony and suffering as a result of massive violation of human rights. We have suffered from all kinds of indignities ranging from slavery, colonialism, aggression and foreign occupation. It is therefore all the more reason that we in Africa should be in the forefront in the struggle for the scrupulous observance of these rights. We should above all strive to ensure that no violations of these rights in our continent is tolerated. In order to achieve this objective as well as to enable our continent to contribute with the rest of the world in consolidating the respect and protection of human rights, we need to strengthen our institutions at the national and continental level. We also need to strengthen the culture

of tolerance within and among our societies. At the same time, in concert with the other members of the human family, Africans must continue to struggle for a world order which is humane and takes into account the legitimate aspiration of our people for economic and social development which cannot be divorced from the broader human rights agenda.

Your Excellencies,

Africa is determined to contribute positively to the success of the World Conference on Human Rights. I am confident that the deliberations of the Tunis conference which you Mr. President, are about to inaugurate, will be of considerable input to the main conference.

Mr. President,

Our conference here in Tunis coincides with your country's celebrations marking the fifth anniversary of the peaceful change that you pioneered and which has heralded important gains for the Tunisian people towards democracy and development. We wish you Mr. President and the fraternal Tunisian people greater successes, conscious as we are that Tunisia's progress, stability and development enhances Africa's strength.

I thank you.