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Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ARAB SUMMIT**

AMMAN, JORDAN

27 MARCH 2001

Your Majesty King Abdallah II

Your Majesties, Your Highnesses and Your Royal Highnesses,

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Your Excellency, Dr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Maguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States

Your Excellency, Dr. Abdeloiahed Belgziz, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Conference

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalam Alaykum, Warahmatu Allahi Wabarakatuhu

It is a great honour for me to participate at this opening ceremony of the Arab Summit. I wish to express my gratitude to the Government of the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan for the kind invitation that has enabled me and my delegation to be with you here today.

I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty King Abdallah, the Government and People of the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan for the warm welcome and the generous hospitality accorded to us since our arrival in this beautiful and historic city of Amman. I wish also to pay tribute to my colleague and brother Dr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Maguid for his outstanding and dedicated service as Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

The fact that this Summit is being held in Amman, Jordan, is of great significance. It is being held in a country that is committed to the cause of dialogue, peace, security and stability in the region and in the

world as a whole. Indeed, the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan has had a long history of supporting, defending and advocating Arab concerns and interests. The hosting of this summit is thus a further testimony of an unwavering commitment to the solidarity among the people of this region and of the necessity of working together towards a common destiny.

For me, as the Secretary General of the OAU, to be invited at this occasion is yet another manifestation of the consolidation of the historical connection between the people of this region and their African brothers and sisters. It underlines the inseparable and historical bond between our two peoples and our two Organizations. For many centuries there has been strong cooperation in the areas of commerce, diplomacy and culture between Africa and Arab nations. Today, a significant number of Member States of the League of Arab States are also members of the OAU. This leaves no doubt that our fates are bound, we face common challenges, and we share some common aspirations for the destiny of our peoples.

This Summit is convening at a critical juncture. It is taking place at a time when the Arab world is confronted with enormous challenges whose tackling more than ever require the collective unity, cohesion and solidarity of the Pan-Arab community. The Amman Summit is being held when the Peace Process in the Middle East is confronted with serious setbacks. Nowhere is this more evident than the situation in Palestine. The violence, suffering and humiliation meted upon the Palestinian people is not only profoundly distressing, but indeed constitute a challenge to our conscience and that of the international community at large.

I wish here to solemnly reaffirm the unwavering and total support and solidarity of Africa for the just struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and independence. This support was eloquently displayed in Sirte earlier this month at the Extraordinary Summit of the

OAU in which President Yasser Arafat participated. I also wish to reiterate OAU's support for the restoration of all the occupied Arab lands including the Golan Heights in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The Organization of African Unity and the League of Arab States share common concerns on matters relating to peace, security and stability in some of our common member states. We, therefore, need to reinforce our cooperation and concerted action in search for durable solutions to the conflicts in Southern Sudan and Somalia as well as the now-diminishing crisis in the Comoros. In similar vein, we must intensify our efforts for the immediate and unconditional permanent lifting of sanctions against the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya especially bearing in mind that it has fully complied with the UN Security Council resolutions with respect to the Lockerbie issue.

In the next two days, you will be devoting yourselves to addressing important and critical issues concerning this region. It is my hope that you will also have an opportunity to discuss the ways and means of harnessing the immense potential that exists between the people of Arab countries and those of Africa. Indeed, in the past we have worked together on common issues affecting us. In solidarity, our peoples have fought shoulder to shoulder in dismantling colonialism and the despicable system of apartheid. In the same manner, the struggle of the Palestinian people resonates throughout the length and breadth of Africa. On the whole, there has been a close interaction between our two peoples, with the rendering of support on each other's causes.

In view of the emerging challenges, Africa and the Arab World have no option but to consolidate their historical relationship. More than any other people, our two communities have to foster closer cooperation not only because of our common objectives and a shared vision, but the actual geographical and historical imperatives make us duty bound to do so. We need, therefore, to develop a strategic vision that enable us to

identify and rectify some of our deficiencies, mobilize ourselves effectively and endeavour to accomplish our desired objectives.

The institutional mechanisms for Afro-Arab cooperation do exist. The first Afro-Arab Summit held in Cairo, in March 1977 established a number of mechanisms and structures through which programmes for our cooperation could be implemented and monitored. It is true, that both Africa and the Arab world had been encountering some difficulties that have contributed to impeding the functioning of some of these institutions. I strongly believe, however, that these circumstances are only transient and that they can be overcome. Our nations and Organizations have to work together and complement each other in surmounting the challenges facing us.

On our part, as Africans, we have embarked on that path, and we are determined to overcome the scourge of conflicts that has wrecked havoc among our populations and dissipated African energies. On this, we sincerely appreciate the invaluable support we have received from our Arab brothers and sisters. Africa is also committed to transform its institutions of governance so as to ensure whole societies are involved in the determination of the destiny of our nations and, in that manner, the future of our continent.

We have also committed ourselves to consolidate African Unity which we believe is the only means through which a better tomorrow for African people can be attained. Early this month, as part of these efforts, African leaders meeting at an Extra-Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the OAU in Sirte, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, proudly declared the establishment of the African Union. This is a commitment that they had earlier undertaken on 9.9.99. Since then, through intense frank and objective deliberations at various levels, all the Member States have signed the Constitutive Act, and only three ratifications are remaining for the Act to enter into force. Indeed, when the Act has been fully

operationalized, and the institutions are put in place, Africa will not only have succeeded to strengthen its own unity, but it will have enhanced the framework for cooperation with all its partners.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm the readiness and willingness of the OAU to continue working closely with the League of Arab States. Our relationship is valuable and strategic, and it needs to be sustained and enhanced both in times of trials and tribulations as well as in good times.

I thank you for your attention.

Wassalam Alaikum Wa Rahmat Allah Wa Barakatu.