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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

"THE PACE OF CHANGE - AFRICA'S CHALLENGE"

BY

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SECRETARY GENERAL,
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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin my brief remarks by thanking the organizers of this Conference for honouring me with an invitation to speak before this distinguished audience.

Mr. Chairman,

This is a gathering of professionals - individuals from Organizations which by way of public relations, help build bridges of understanding among people and defeat the many artificial and subjective differences which are too often gratuitously used to divide humanity. Being a little familiar with the world of communications and media myself, I am keenly aware of the immense power you dispose and the capabilities you possess to influence public opinion. My hope is that, that power and capability would always be used wisely and put to the service of truth and objectivity.

All too often the outside world tends to have a distorted image of the Continent of Africa. It is often the result of the work of journalists who perhaps for need of a catching headline or simply to conjure the imaginations of their audience, are

prepared to subordinate truth and objectivity to sensationalism. Sensationalism does of course sell and it may not always be easy for a journalist looking for a professional break or to sell an article, to observe fully the rules of objectivity; in return for the mere moral gratification of having observed the ethics of the profession.

This is not to argue that wrong things, incidents and injustices taking place in our continent should not be reported. Far from that. The media serves our continent well by reporting the things that have gone wrong. Yet the image of Africa as a continent bedevilled only with calamities man-made and natural of one type or another - ranging from famine, drought, violence and coups d'état, mismanagement, dictatorships, corruption is excessively stereotype. There is a real need for a balance and more objective portrayal of what is going on in our continent. While it is true that africa has more than its fair share of problems - some of which are of our own making and these must be exposed, it is equally true that in many African States herculean efforts are made notwithstanding formidable odds to overcome these and other problem. Yet, these efforts remain largely ignored.

What i am trying to say is that Africa has not been fairly treated in the world of information and communications media. The efforts and achievements of the continent are not fully understood and appreciated abroad. It is therefore in the rectification of this imbalance where individuals like yourselves can make a difference. Africa's wrongs including its acts of omission and commission must not be put under the carpet. At the same time however its achievements and efforts must be recognized.

Mr. Chairman,

Your Conference is convening at a particularly crucial time for Africa. The theme of your Conference "The Pace of Change - Africa's Challenge" is apt and quite relevant to the times we are going through. Africa is now gripped by the fever of change. All across the Continent, we see an awakening to the realities of the economic difficulties, and an increasing demand to address matters of human rights and political governance. We see the reemergence of separatism, tribalism and even clannism and the persistence of conflicts and the attendant problems of instability and refugees. We are witnessing also an emerging realisation, that the problems of Africa are intertwined and thus require an integrated approach to resolve. Whether in dealing with matters of the shared environment, of economic recovery and development, there is the realization that a solution lies in unity of purpose and action.

What is taking place in Africa, is happening against the background of a fundamentally transformed international political situation. All these changes external and internal, provide opportunities and challenges to the Continent. It is on the content of this change and the challenges which now face the African countries, which I propose to address my remarks.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa is in a state of political flux but so too is the greater part of the world. The fundamental changes which have taken place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the resultant end of the cold war, has changed the geo-strategic place of Africa in world politics. Every country in the world, is grappling with the task of redefining its role and place in the

emerging new order. Western Europe is trying to adjust to a life without the perceived fear of Soviet threat. Eastern Europe is taking its first faltering steps towards consolidating democracy and maintaining national unity without the patronage of a Super Power. The United States is also in the process of adjusting to a world without communist Soviet Union, and one in which it has been left as the only remaining Super Power. In Asia and elsewhere the preoccupation is one of striving to define the new order. For African countries this represents a fundamental change both in how they relate to each other and collectively, how they relate to the rest of the world. This emerging new order, has created new priorities for the developed countries of Europe and the United States - traditionally, the benefactors of Africa. Western Europe, is understandably preoccupied with the stability and economic recovery of Eastern Europe.

To Western Europe, Eastern Europe occupies a special place and provides new opportunities for a greater Europe and ultimately for business. For an investor of the West, the developed infrastructure, availability of skilled manpower and the potential absorptive capacities of its economies, make Eastern Europe an attractive place in which to invest. In addition, the Geographical proximity, the cultural, historical and traditional links, between the two parts of Europe, are potential catalyst to trade and investment growth in the Continent.

This preoccupation with itself will inevitably deflect the attention of Europe from Africa. This in itself may not necessarily be bad. Generalized economic recovery of Europe will naturally impact positively on the economies of the other parts of the world including Africa. Yet, there is the other side of the coin. The members of the European Economic Community alone, setting aside other European countries which are not, account for a greater portion of Africa's business dealings and provide

substantial aid. For example, the Community buys 58% of Africa's exports and we buy 53% of our imports from it. The Community accounts for about 40% of all official development assistance and about the same percentage of private resource flows to Africa. The Community's total aid to Africa stands at about \$2.5 billion ECU or about \$3 billion. The Fourth Lome Convention provides for a financial package of ECU \$12 billion for five years and another ECU \$10 billion in the form of grants. The Community is therefore Africa's main trading and development partner.

In addition to the Community, there are other countries, especially the Nordics which have generously assisted Africa in its development efforts both officially and privately.

The concern is based on the increasing realization that Europe's preoccupation with recovery efforts of Eastern Europe and now Soviet Union, will inevitably have effect on resource flows to Africa, notwithstanding the repeated assurances to the contrary. This concern is given added urgency by the political direction which the support to East European and Soviet Union economic recovery is receiving.

The support is not from risk-taking private investors but from billions of dollars in official government assistance channelled through the International Bank for the Economic Reconstruction of Eastern Europe based in London. This is of course in stark contrast to the refusal of Western countries to accept the principle of commitment to Africa's recovery efforts much less to the commitment of massive resource flow.

This is an illustration of the change which has taken place. Africa must draw the necessary lessons and adjust to a less benevolent Europe and one which places priority on the problems of Europe. The good part of this is that perhaps now Africa will

be jolted out of its slumber in the illusion of charity and awaken to the imperative of self-reliance. It is this awakening which will in my view, constitute a redefinition of the role and place of Africa in the emerging new order. The challenge of Africa is to strive to ensure that the new order is not one which marginalizes and relegates her to the fringes of the International System, but one in which she can play a meaningful role. We should demand to see that the new order is one rooted in International Legality and founded upon the principles of equality of nations and peoples. It must be an order which promotes International harmony and the conduct of relations among States to mutual advantage. It must be an order which abandons for ever militarism and the misplaced geomilitary strategic concepts of the past and redirects its resources to the elimination of global poverty and to the preservation of the environment.

Mr. Chairman,

While it is imperative to redifine the place and role of Africa in the new order, we must first be able to assess our strength and weaknesses. Whether in the field of the economy, peace and stability or democratization, Africa will need to take a look at itself more critically. For, ultimately, only if we are able to recognize our weaknesses and strength, can we prepare ourselves adequately to fight for a rightful place in the world of the future.

Mr. Chairman,

Less than a decade to the next millenium, Africa remains the poorest continent. All indicators of the economic performance show Africa slipping deeper into poverty at a time when all the

other regions of the world show gradual ascendance into prosperity. This is in spite of the many strenuous efforts by our countries to put in place the kind of policies which promote growth and investment and structural adjustment programmes. This is also in spite of the increase in the volume of Africa's commodity exports.

Africa has been severely affected by the plummeting prices of commodities. World Bank statistics indicate that real non-oil commodity prices, have fallen steadily, over the last two decades. For example, between 1973 - 1990, the index of real non-oil commodities fell by about 40%. World markets for specific commodities like coffee, tea and cocoa on which a country like Kenya depends, have fallen an average rate of 11% over the last ten years. Price for cocoa alone, has fallen an incredible 60% since 1979 to the present. It is estimated that the fall of commodity prices alone cost Africa \$19 billion in 1986 and \$50 billion between 1986 and 1990. Thus despite an annual increase of 2.5% in export volume, the United Nations reports that Africa's earnings globally fell an average of 16% between 1986 and 1990; in nominal terms, from \$65.2 billion during the period 1981-1985 to \$54.8 billion during 1986 - 1990.

Apart from the loss of income resulting from the fall in commodity prices, Africa has had to deal with the debilitating effects of its external indebtedness which has risen from \$203 billion in 1986 and, currently stands at over \$271 billion and mounting. This represents an increase from 54% of Africa's Gross Domestic Product in 1986 to over 109% last year. This debt stock is estimated to have cost the poor and aid-receiving Africa, an astronomical \$23 billion to service in 1990 alone. This reverse flow of resources, severely crippled the efforts of Africa at mobilizing domestic savings for investment. Africa has suffered from the operations of even those International Financial and

Monetary Institutions which were aimed at assisting through Structural Adjustment arrangements. It is evident that Africa's efforts of boosting resource flows were negatively affected by repayments to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. For example, the United Nations reports that net disbursement by the World Bank to Africa totalling \$7.6 billion between 1986 - 1989, amounted to actual net transfers of only \$4.9 billion due to repayments of interests and other debt servicing associated charges. It is also reported that with regard to the IMF, such charges averaging \$676 million, annually meant that for all but one year during the three years between 1986 - 89, African countries paid back more to it than they received.

Mr. Chairman,

I am told by financial experts that the growth of Africa's debt stock is not a result of new lending but due to the increases in the real interest rates, adverse fluctuations in the United States dollar and of debt rescheduling which the Paris and London Clubs administer.

It is estimated that reschedulings alone, account for 45% of the growth in debt. Rescheduling is a stop-gap emergence facility aimed at providing a short-term solution to insolvency of the debtors. Since however the debt principal is not forgiven but temporarily set aside, interest continues to mount and thus further compounding the problem. To show how Africa is locked in this vicious cycle of debt, the World Bank reports that over the last seven years no African country has been able to meet the terms of its reschedulings. Thirty-one countries have had their debt rescheduled 83 times, sixteen of these have rescheduled more than thrice.

This hemorrhage of resources, has taken place against the background of contraction of the volume of foreign investment as well as development assistance. The commitments for increased resource flow to Africa agreed on in 1986 for example, were not fully honored. Admittedly, while some donors increased their financial support, overall, real net flows to Africa, actually fell from \$24.6 billion in 1986 to \$23.3 billion last year.

Beyond these statistical abstractions, is the grim reality of the suffering of the people of Africa. The social implications of these statistics, have included higher illiteracy rates which now averages 47% on the Continent, a lower life expectancy of 52 years and diminished capacities of governments to meet the social needs of an expanding population. High infant mortality rates, malnutrition, hunger and disease have all combined to exact a heavy toll on the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

If I paint such a gloomy picture of the condition of the Continent it is not to vindicate those who want us to believe that the Continent is condemned to eternal poverty. Rather, it is to show the magnitude of the task of rebuilding our economies which lies ahead. It is also to show the realities of the International Economic System which Africa must deal with. We must accept that we operate in a hostile environment-one of dwindling interest in our poverty. Africa has of course deployed remarkable efforts to cope with current economic difficulties. Governments have entered into Structural Adjustment Programmes with the International Monetary and Financial Institutions quite

often at great social cost and political risks. Orthodox adjustment measures have been emplaced notwithstanding their inadequacies or debilitating effects to the society especially to those most vulnerable segments such as women and children. Sweeping reductions in government spending has, meant lower school enrolment of children, lack of affordable essential drugs and a suspension of a host of other essential services. All these sacrifices have still not brought about any meaningful recovery to most of our economies.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa has to pursue policies which will put a halt to the present trend of perpetuating dependence and being subjected to the vicious cycle of poverty, debt and adjustment. The economic challenge to the individual countries of Africa is to seek better governance and to ensure that such governance is put to the service of development in the larger sense. Good governance should be applied as a catalyst in the elaboration of better strategies for development in which the inputs of views and ideas of the people who are after all the ultimate beneficiary, are full integrated. It is only, such strategies which emphasize long-term growth, situate the people at the centre of development and through the process of popular participation, empower them, which will ultimately lift the countries out of their economic doldrums and steer them on the

path of full recovery and growth. Naturally, this recovery and growth will be possible only if those good strategies of development are pursued with vigour, discipline and good management. Good management of our economies must of course involve not only sound fiscal policies but also financial accountability on those who manage. But those who manage must be equipped to do so. We should therefore equally invest in capacity building within our countries. We must in tandem with investing in human resource development, create conducive economic and political conditions for trained men and women to be motivated to remain in Africa so that we may gradually reverse the brain drain.

Mr. Chairman,

While good policies, good management and popular participation, can create possibilities of recovery and growth, in the long run, individually, the African countries cannot make an impact. It is this realization which in 1980 in Lagos, led the Leaders of Africa to adopt the Lagos Plan of Action and its Final Act as a blue print for Africa's economic recovery and development. The Plan of Action recognized that Africa must extricate herself from dependence on charity and face the challenge of genuine collective self-reliance. The Plan also recognized that no matter how much Structural Adjustment is made, Africa could not restore its economy to sound footing and growth, unless it reseeded the initiative and embarked on cooperation.

The spirit of that resolve, was subsumed in the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community which was adopted at the last Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Abuja - Nigeria in June this year.

The Treaty, sets out the Continent's Agenda of integration. It is in realization that in the world of tomorrow, it will be only those entities which are larger and integrated, which will compete effectively. It is this realization which made European countries, each individually strong enough to stand on its own and some stronger than the entire Africa put together, to agree in principle to converge in an economic union by the end 1992. If the Europeans need economic integration, how about Africa ?

Mr. Chairman,

In Abuja, the Leaders of Africa took the first but most important step towards integration. At the OAU, we see the next phases beyond the ratification of the Treaty, as involving the coordination of the work of the existing regional economic groupings and harmonizing their programmes, into an agenda of continental integration. The Preferential Trade Area, the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Maghreb Union, will provide the structural support for the African Community. The goal is to use these institutions as the nucleus and gradually bring their structures, activities and programmes into convergence and finally fuse into an Economic Community. In the short run, the idea is to begin action with the most integrative sectors such as transport, communications, trade and finance. The challenge of the countries of Africa is to take the challenge of integration seriously. For beyond signature and ratification of the Treaty, lies the greater responsibility of Governments to implement the Treaty. Countries will have to strive to stimulate trade and increase continental access to finance. This we can do most effectively, if it is done collectively and at the continental level. In tandem with arguing for greater resource flows and access to markets abroad,

Africa must begin in earnest, the process towards greater integration of its own markets. This is why, I am encouraged by the recent announcement of the Leaders of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania of their intention to revive the East African Community. As a sub-regional framework of cooperation, the community would be a welcome addition to the mechanisms of integration. I hope nonetheless, that if ultimately agreement is reached in East Africa on a framework of cooperation, it will be in the spirit of contributing to the goal of the greater integration of the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

The African Economic Community, will not be a community of goods and services but of people. It is the Community of interests of the people which the community is supposed to serve. The challenge is also to ensure that the people of Africa are fully involved in the process of building that community. The people must be involved beginning at the grassroot level. The people of Africa must feel they are part of the community and that the community is in turn a vehicle of articulating their oneness. We at the OAU, can help in ensuring that the process is kept on course but the primary responsibility rests upon all Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

Central to any strategy of Africa's economic recovery and development is the question of peace and stability of the Continent. Various parts of the Continent are engulfed in conflicts - some new, some old. These conflicts have bled the resources of the Continent and claimed millions of innocent lives

and resulted in massive destruction of property. The human cost of these conflicts has involved the millions of refugees and displaced persons now drifting across the Continent in search of safety and succour. The conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia and Mozambique are among those which need urgent resolution. Africa cannot develop unless we are able to harness our resources and use them rationally. The millions now wasted in unnecessary conflicts could otherwise be channelled to productive use.

The challenge of Africa is to find viable and lasting solutions to these conflicts so that those countries now consumed by war can begin the healing process.

Mr. Chairman,

At the level of the OAU, I am encouraged by the increasing acceptance by even those now involved in conflicts, that the Organization can play a role in finding solutions even to internal conflicts. This acceptance, heralds a new beginning; and a parting with the past. Before now, States did not accept the notion that the OAU has a view about internal conflicts much less a role in their resolution. The narrow interpretation of sovereignty, had locked the African States out of critical and timely opportunities to submit their conflicts to mediated settlement. The challenge of the OAU and Member States generally is to nurture this emerging trend, consolidate it and weave it integrally into the political fabric of the Continent. At the heart of this new trend is the determination that Africa generally, has a stake in the peace and stability of each individual State. The fortunes of the African States are linked. A view is also consolidating that African countries cannot stand by in apparent helplessness while another country tears itself apart. It is also increasingly felt that Africa can no longer afford to hide behind the

technicalities of the notion of noninterference while in full awareness that the effects of those conflicts are bound to spill over into neighbouring countries and that the instability attendant to them would impact negatively on the Continent as a whole.

In addition to the acceptance by countries that the OAU has a view and role in conflict resolution, there is also the corresponding assertion by African countries, that they have the right and indeed the duty to intervene constructively in a conflict with a view to promoting its rapid and pacific settlement. It is this assertion, in the face of the mayhem and carnage which compelled the countries of West Africa to intervene in the conflict in Liberia. While a permanent solution has yet to be put in place, thanks to that timely intervention, sanity and relative calm has been restored to Liberia and humanitarian assistance can now be provided. Happily also, prospects for a political solution under the aegis of ECOWAS now seem much brighter.

Mr. Chairman,

Apart from those conflicts within countries, there are those among them. Even though little recourse has been had by countries to the established OAU mechanism of the commission on mediation, arbitration and reconciliation, there have been nonetheless, continuous efforts at mediating in conflicts. Whether under the good offices of the Current Chairman; Committees of wise men, or of the Secretary General, the OAU has deployed tremendous efforts at diffusing tensions and containing conflicts and ultimately laying ground for a framework of settlement. More often than not; parties to conflicts have received favourably these mechanisms of the OAU conflict resolution when they are placed at their disposal.

The challenge is equally therefore to consolidate the existing mechanism and where inadequate reinforce them with the requisite resources to back-stop the agenda of the African countries of conflict management and resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

The conflict arising from apartheid in South Africa is yet to be resolved even if the optimism of many is nearly euphoric. Today, South Africa stands at cross roads. On the one hand, the prospects for a rebirth of a New South Africa founded on justice and racial equality are encouraging. On the other the possibilities that the movement towards the eradication of apartheid can be halted and that what has been achieved so far can be reversed, are still real.

Ever since Mr. Nelson Mandela was released from the many years of incarceration and the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and other anti-apartheid Organisations, there have been measures taken which convinced many that the march towards the dismantling of the structures of apartheid was firmly set on an irreversible course. The repeal of the key legislations of apartheid such as the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act, the Land Act and the International Security Act, was seen as demonstrating the commitment of Mr. de Klerk and his government to bring an end to apartheid. The exploratory talks between the ANC and the Government which resulted in the Groote Schuur and Pretoria Minutes, were all seen in the context of a New beginning - A beginning in which both the black majority and the Apartheid authorities could sit together and look ahead at the kind of a New South Africa which all South Africans want. It is the totality of all these developments which gave impetus to the feeling that Mr. de Klerk deserved to be rewarded with the relaxation of

sanctions as an incentive to his government to persist in the process towards change.

Mr. Chairman,

It has all along been the view of the Organisation of African Unity that indeed, there have been important developments in South Africa. All the measures taken by Mr. de Klerk were noted as representing an important beginning of what is otherwise a long journey towards the actual dismantling of apartheid which has yet to begin. Regrettably however, the abolition of these key legislations, important as it was, did not bring an end to Apartheid. The petty and perhaps most offending manifestations of Apartheid may have gone, but the fundamentals of the policy remain.

Mr. Chairman,

Apartheid Legislations derive their legitimacy and force of law from the Constitution of South Africa. To date, notwithstanding all that has taken place, South Africa continues to be governed in segregation and under Apartheid philosophy, law and authority. And for all Mr. de Klerk has accepted as constituting elements of a new philosophy to be embodied in a possible future constitution, he has not yet conceded the principle of democracy.

Of course, I am encouraged by what has been achieved so far and the general direction of the process. The pronouncements of both the leadership of the black majority under the ANC and the PAC as well as of the Government, continue to emphasize dialogue as a key to South Africa's future. Africa has all along supported negotiations as the primary method of ending the conflict

in South Africa. As far back as 1969, in the Lusaka Manifesto, Africa had pledged her readiness to pursue negotiations if genuine conditions were created. It took years of armed struggle and sanctions for the Apartheid authorities to accept creating those conditions.

Mr. Chairman,

While it is important to recognize that change has taken place, it is also important to recognize that, that change has not removed apartheid. And therefore while we now have accepted that we resume people to people contacts with a view to promoting change, we must also insist that the ultimate objective of bringing a non-racial, united, and democratic South Africa is not abandoned in the euphoria of the hour.

What is important is to ensure that the process towards setting up a transition mechanism and elaboration of a new constitution is begun in earnest. Our challenge in South Africa is first to ensure that President de Klerk remains committed to the principle of change and secondly that the process of negotiating transition arrangements and drawing up a new constitution is put in motion. In tandem with these two objectives, we must continue to urge the black majority to forge unity. We are encouraged by the formation of the Patriotic Front following the holding in the Patriotic Congress, last month in Durban. We must continue to urge unity. We must also urge an end to the violence which has not only claimed many lives but now undermines the struggle to eliminate apartheid. While the violence is clearly instigated by some elements of the Apartheid Security Forces, the black majority and in particular the black leadership must assume their own responsibility. They should promote harmony, tolerance and unity among themselves.

Our challenge in South Africa is therefore to promote change, and to help all the parties in promoting that change. In order to do so effectively however, we need to maintain vigilance. We are not yet out of the woods and it is not far fetched to say that classical Apartheid can be reborn any time. Apartheid may have been knocked unconscious, but it is certainly not dead. As we seek to recognize the changes which have taken place and to reward them with relaxation of sanctions, we should also see the greater and more difficult tasks which lie ahead. We should remember that the objective of sanctions was to bring about a free democratic non-racial and united South Africa governed under a new constitution. That stage is far from being reached and the process towards dismantling apartheid has not reached the stage of irreversibility. For only until a new non-racial Constitution is in place, Mr. Mandela and the black majority can vote and South Africa is reorganized on a democratic basis can we say that we are all free.

Mr. Chairman,

Among the most horrific results of the conflicts in Africa is the refugee phenomenon; and the human drama attendant to it. The scourge of refugees continues to be a major hindrance to economic development of the Continent, to say the least of the human cost it involves. The many graphic and shocking scenes of starving and dying children, of masses of humanity trekking in search of safer places, which are repeatedly flashed on European, American and other foreign television sets world-wide, do not speak well of our Continent. Africa is being portrayed as a place where hope is illusive, where suffering and violence of all forms have become endemic. The challenge of Africa must now be to put an end to this human drama. The choices are ours and the means of achieving this objective well within our grasp. The choices must include, a recognition that unless we tackle

the fundamental causes of the refugee problem, we cannot possibly prescribe the right medicine for its cure. While there are many causes of refugees including natural calamities, but by far, the most effective engine for generating refugees, has been politics. Differences between and within nations in the form of boundaries, religion, ideology, ethnicity, race and the like, have often erupted into wars and armed conflicts with the attendant disruption of social order, and compelled millions to flee into exile either within their countries or beyond borders. Sadly today, Africa has over five million refugees and more than twelve million more displaced.

The challenge of finding a definitive lasting solution is in the long term. In the meantime however, there is the human challenge which Africa must meet. It is to help the present refugee and displaced population materially. This all the more urgent given the increasingly evident disillusionment of the humanitarian and donor communities; over the seeming failure of Africa to find solutions to its refugee problem. There is now the so-called donor fatigue. The humanitarian needs of the men, women and children who now languish in refugee camps are many and need to be attended to. We cannot abandon them to further deprivation and suffering. I wish therefore to take this opportunity to appeal to the International Community to respond to the pressing needs of these refugees with increased humanitarian assistance.

But beyond meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of the refugees, time has come for Africa to stand up to those countries and societies which refuse to make the necessary social accommodations and political concessions and in turn precipitate conflicts and refugees. We should say it loud and clear that every African country or society has an obligation to make the necessary amends to ensure peace and harmony. Correspondingly,

we should make it clear that no country or society has the right to fail to make those ammends and precipitate exodus of its people and expect others to shoulder its problem of refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

In facing the challenges of the economy, of conflicts, refugees and those of political governance, Africa will unavoidably have to address herself to the question of people and how they are situated in the interplay of the economy and of government. Central to the definition of the place of people is the role they play in the determination of the direction of both the economy and the government. Since the economy and government involve the people, and they themselves, are the function and subject of the two institutions, what I am saying in otherwords is debate on the role of people in determining their fate. It is the debate about democracy in Africa.

There is a consensus view that a people whose political freedom is circumscribed, cannot fully apply itself to its own self-advancement. Political freedom, within an enabling environment, engenders free flow and exchange of ideas and triggers the creative genius of a people. Through the maximization of the opportunities which political freedom provides, a society can harness its energies and industry and apply them to productive use. It is the extent of how much a society is capable of harnessing the full potential of its energies which determines in part, its level of socio-economic development.

To that extent therefore, the degree of political freedom, has a direct relationship, though not a symbiotic one, with development. Consequently, in order that Africa can maximize the possibilities of our development, we must take a keen look at how people relate to the systems of government and the

development process. We must face the challenges of democracy and the actual further democratisation of our societies, with the urgency it deserves.

Mr. Chairman,

Part of Africa's problems which have led to stagnation, has been the disillusionment of the people with the inadequacies of government, its rigidities, perceived or actual insensitivity and resistance to change. People have retrenched into despair and deep cynicism. To retrieve them from the prejudices brought about by disillusionment and cynicism will require a new dynamism on the part of governments. It will require a new way of doing business, in which people are made to feel that they no longer operate on the peripheral margins of the system but feel that they are an integral part of it, with a stake in its preservation and consolidation. This change will be brought about by a conversion to popular participation. It must be a participation, in which the people are situated at the centre of development and the decision making process of government. It will have to be the kind of involvement which brings the people into a new concord with the governments - one which places obligations and responsibilities to both and recognizes that such partnership is of mutual benefit. It will have to be the kind of participation in which the people decide on how they are governed, by who, and for how long. This participation, must however be given a framework in which to operate.

There is debate on the best of such frameworks. Some have argued for multipartism and some for one or two political parties. Obviously each has its merits and demerits. Ultimately, however, it is the prerogative of any society in consideration of its own peculiar circumstances and needs, to opt for whichever framework

it deems best suitable. I for one believes that the essence of democracy is to bring about a society built on Constitutional rule and in which people are enabled to exercise their full rights to participatory democracy, enjoy equal protection under the law and are masters of their destiny. The essence is equally to create governments which are responsible to and accountable to the people, governments which emanate from the will of the people through the ballot, which are transparent and operate within the confines of the Law. We must strive to establish social systems which are geared to the promotion of the equality and worth of individuals and which are overseen by an independent and responsible judiciary. Such a permitting political environment should foster tolerance and challenge an equally free, responsible and objective press to the imperative of promoting national unity. Such a system self-policed through checks and balances inherent in democracy, would certainly anchor Africa firmly into the ground of development. All these are ingredients of a system which Africa must seek to establish. These are the essential attributes of democracy which are universal. We cannot say that they apply to other countries but not Africa. What we can say, however, is that Africa can articulate them within a framework which is more relevant and attune to its own realities. Let me also say that in strengthening the culture of democratic Institutions in our Continent we must strive to ensure that our efforts are complemented by a keen spirit of tolerance.

Africa is the most heterogeneous of all Continents. It is a melting pot of cultures. It is a Continent of many races, religions and beliefs. The strength of the Continent also lies in its diversity of people, and even of topography and geography. To put this diversity to the service of Africa is also a challenge which must be met. But we can do so if we recognize that, that diversity is a factor of strength and not grounds for differences and disunity. We can do so most effectively if we are prepared

to subordinate our subjective differences and prejudices to the imperative of building an Africa founded in its unity in diversity.

We should therefore defeat prejudice in all its manifestation whether within nations or among nations. We should endeavour to promote religious, cultural and racial tolerance; so as to bring about peace and social harmony on the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa is a Continent which has suffered every possible indignity which mankind has been subjected to. Slavery and colonialism, and the violence and inhumanity which they engendered, scarred Africa very deeply. The legacies of these evils are very much in evidence everywhere on the Continent. Central and common to both slavery and colonialism, was the systematic abuse of human rights. Human rights and the most fundamental freedoms were completely denied to Africans. Little wonder therefore that at independence, Africa inherited governmental structures and procedures built on the experience and needs colonialism and consequently lacking any philosophical content of human rights. The accent was put on the maintenance of Law and Order to protect the status quo of entrenched privileges and interests of the remnants of the empire and a select few.

Africa inherited new and alien forms of governments, the functioning of which at times contradicted or conflicted with the traditional systems of governance. The experience of most of Africa over the last three decades, has been that of constantly trying to adjust the inherited mechanisms of government to both the needs of society for development and social harmony. If at times, human rights were not given a central place, it is not because African governments set up en masse and systematically to abuse human rights. Rather it is in part because the systems

and structures of government which were bequeathed to Africa, did not provide for mechanisms for the promotion of human rights. The emphasis was the maintenance of Law and Order irrespective of its implications to human rights and other fundamental freedoms. It was also in part due to the inevitable conceptual differences between the Western and African traditional systems, of what constituted human rights. The concepts of individual as opposed to community rights continued to prove difficult to balance as Africans, grappled with the challenges of self-governance.

Africans who have suffered in deprivation of human rights, should be the last to be lectured about human rights. Today, thirty years of independence have provided ample time to bring the systems of government more in harmony with our traditional systems, values and customs. The result, should be a more open and permitting system in which the enjoyment of human rights, is an automatic right inherent in good government. It is heartening to note that Africa and its leaders have awakened to the imperative of protecting and promoting human rights. The exigence of the rule of Law and the respect of human rights is increasingly becoming a fundamental consideration of our societies.

At the level of the Continent, Africa has adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples rights. Its essence is the recognition of the sacrosanctity of the human and peoples rights and the obligation and roles of governments to defend and promote them. The Organisation of African Unity has given institutional support to that Charter by setting up the Commission on Human and Peoples Rights based in Banjul - Gambia. The commission, once fully consolidated, will act as the Human Rights ombudsman of Africa. Member States have also responded to complement the efforts of the Organization of African Unity. There are now, in operation, national human rights committees in many countries. In addition, many countries, have enacted laws which give the

activities of these committees, the force of law and in so doing placing human rights issues in the mainstream of their political agenda. The challenge in this case is also to ensure that human rights are protected, while at the same time, insisting that the specific circumstances of culture, customs and traditions of Africa, are fully taken into account in evolving a human rights agenda for africa. Let me repeat, the people of this continent who have suffered more than any other people from the persistent violations of human rights for generation - indeed for centuries, must be in the forefront in defence of these rights. The adherence of African States to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the OAU Charter on Human and Peoples Rights impose upon them the obligations to respect and indeed champion these rights.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa will change and is already changing. No one recognizes the inevitability of change and its implications more than the africans themselves. They are the subject, and function of that change. It would therefore seem unnecessary and indeed superflous for Africans to be repeatedly lectured about change. Rather than sermonizing about change, the outside world should in a constructive way, help Africans manage that change, so that the continent can transit through to the next phase, with the least disruption of social order and least negative impact to the gains we have achieved so far. Africa needs change but so does it peace and stability. For change cannot be meaningful if it breeds instability, precipitates insecurity and undermines unity. We want change and continuity.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa exists today in a rapidly changing world. The pace of change is very rapid and the response to it must be equally rapid. The end of classical liberation of the Continent coincided with the end of the cold war. The end of the armed liberation struggle and the Apartheid destabilization that went with it in the case of Southern Africa, has opened new frontiers of hope. The evolving situation in South Africa, beams a ray of hope that, finally Africa and the world as a whole, will rid itself of the last vestiges of institutionalized racism. The emergence of South Africa as a society out of the oppression of racism and the return of that country to international life, will be a welcome addition to the African ranks. The know-how and economic power of South Africa if used prudently and creatively promises to be an engine of economic growth in Southern Africa and Africa as a whole. The peace-dividend accruing from the end of destabilization and scalingdown of military expenditures in the countries of the region, must be used to meet the pressing needs of the people.

Similarly, the demise of cold war, and the end of cold war related conflicts in Africa will not only bring about peace in our Continent but liberate the immense resources and energies which were worthlessly expended in these conflicts. The end of cold war came almost unexpectedly and rapidly. Africa must seize the challenge of taking advantages which the new peace environment offers.

The end of these issues which in the past diverted the attention of our countries, must usher in an era of introspection. We should now deploy with greater determination our resources and creativity, to the ending of the endemic conflicts on our Continent, and tackle the emerging new agenda for the Continent. The shared problems of the protection of the Environment,

combatting drug abuse and trafficking, refugees, the economic recovery of our economies and the establishment of the African Economic Community, must bring African countries into a partnership for change. That partnership of countries can only endure if it is rooted in the collective interests of the people of Africa. It is the people who are the subject and purpose of development; they should therefore be placed at the centre of it, be empowered and enabled to determine their destiny. The further democratization of our societies, observance of human rights, creation of transparent and accountable governments, an independent judiciary and free and responsible press are all the challenges Africa must meet.

Africa has begun on the road to self-liberation even if its many efforts are at times gratuitously not acknowledged. What institutions like yours can do, is to help spread the word not of misplaced praises or placation but of objectivity and true rendition of the African situation.

I thank you.