



23

Organization of African Unity

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**ROTARY INTERNATIONAL
PRESIDENTIAL PEACE CONFERENCE
ADDIS ABABA, 14 - 16 NOVEMBER 1997**

**Address by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General of the Organization
of African Unity**

- **Your Excellency, Ato Dawit Yohannes,
Speaker of the House of Representatives
of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,**
- **Mr. Glen Kinros,
President of Rotary International,**
- **Your Excellencies,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is, indeed, a great honour for me to address this Presidential Peace Conference of Rotary International. It is also my pleasant duty to welcome all the participants to Addis Ababa, the Headquarters of the Organization of African Unity. We, at the OAU, are delighted that such an important conference of Rotary International is being convened here in Addis Ababa, the Capital of Africa.

Rotary International is not unknown to us at the OAU. It is, indeed, a reputable and prestigious charity institution with which we have, over the last years, been able to develop and conduct joint programmes and with which we stand ready to enhance further our cooperation in the service of the cause of humanity both in Africa and in the rest of the world. The motto

under which Rotary chose to serve its charity cause "*service above self*" is close to our hearts and it is at the heart of our mission at the OAU. That is why we appreciate the role and contribution of Rotarians in helping and serving those of our fellow human beings who may not be as fortunate as many of us are. We are particularly appreciative of the commitment of Rotary to eradicating polio from earth and for its laudable efforts in Africa in providing oral polio vaccine thus greatly contributing in decreasing the spread of this disease in our Continent. We are looking forward to the day when, thanks to the concerted efforts of all men and women of good-will, this disease will be completely eradicated from the planet.

We are also aware of the sustained efforts by Rotary to fight hunger, poverty and to ensure basic education for all. In general, we support and encourage Rotarians to persevere in their humanitarian action aimed at assisting the weak and the deprived in our Continent and in the world. In all its endeavours, Rotary International has proved to be a true humanitarian organization composed of committed and dedicated persons united world wide to provide rescue, help and assistance and build relations of good-will, solidarity and peace.

Against this background, therefore, I wish to seize this unique opportunity to salute Rotary International and all the Rotarians who are gathered here and to assure them of our fullest support and cooperation in their undertakings.

As an Organization at the service of humanity at large, Rotary International is quite familiar with the situation of our Continent and its people; their problems, their frustrations, their aspirations and their expectations. Rotary must be equally aware of the determination of the African peoples to improve their living conditions, to forge ahead with a new destiny for themselves and their children and to create conditions for lasting peace, security and stability in the Continent and for development and social progress.

Indeed, the situation in the Continent is not bleak. Yes, we are still agonizing with the scourge of conflicts with its attendant consequences in terms of loss of lives, destruction and immense suffering inflicted on our peoples. Conflicts have caused acute humanitarian tragedies such as the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. They have forced millions of our people into a life of exile as refugees and displaced persons. They have traumatized generations of Africans and have destroyed the lives of innocent

children caught in the midst of conflicts either as child soldiers or as victims. Yes, poverty, illiteracy and diseases still constitute the daily life of millions of our fellow Africans with their far-reaching implications for the most energetic and dynamic segments of our societies especially the youth and women. Yes, not all Africans enjoy the benefits of democracy, freedom of expression and good governance and, as a result, millions of our peoples are still suffering the agony of injustice and humiliation.

But, there is increasing awareness amongst our peoples that poverty and under-development, oppression and human rights abuses should never be allowed to be a permanent feature in our Continent and that time has come to reverse the trend and prepare for a more decent and dignified life for themselves and their communities.

Today, efforts at all levels, are being deployed in the Continent, from grass-root to leadership level to improve the socio-economic situation and political conditions of the people. Initiatives are being launched by concerned Africans aimed at enhancing popular participation in socio-economic and political processes in their respective countries. African governments are showing greater disposition to take into account peoples aspirations

and are becoming more responsive to the demands of the ordinary peoples. The quest for accountability and transparency in the conduct of public affairs, good governance and respect for human rights is getting stronger and democracy is gaining root in our Continent. The peoples of our Continent are demanding and standing firmly for their socio-economic, human and political rights as citizens of their respective nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the mood and this is the trend in our Continent today. We and you, together with the rest of the international community are duty-bound to support Africa and its peoples in meeting this formidable challenge of socio-economic development and progress in conditions of peace and democracy. The OAU, on its part, as the principal continental Organization, is deploying all efforts aimed at supporting its Member States in this important endeavour. Clearly, the top priority agenda of the Organization is the establishment of peace, security and stability in the Continent through the instrumentality of its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution as a prerequisite for any

meaningful and sustainable socio-economic development. We are, therefore, fully committed to promoting economic development, cooperation and integration in the Continent and to establishing the African Economic Community as the most viable framework for such development. We are also determined to work towards attaining sustainable development through the protection of the environment and the promotion of social development.

In all this, we are cognizant of the need to work together and to build a solid partnership with all organizations and institutions concerned with the destiny of our Continent and its peoples.

I want, therefore, on behalf of the Organization of African Unity, to reaffirm our desire for enhanced cooperation with Rotary International and Rotarians and invite them to be our partners in progress and to join us in this noble and exciting task at the service of our Continent as we prepare to enter the new millennium.

I thank you for your attention and wish the Conference every success.