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ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY SALIM AHMED SALIM ON THE OCCASION OF
THE CONFERMENT OF THE HONORARY DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS
BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI - SATURDAY, JANUARY 29TH, 1983

Mr. Vice Chancellor,
Members of the Council and Senate of the University,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pride and pleasure that I find myself today at the University of Maiduguri to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws and to say a few words of thanks on behalf of the graduates here assembled and, of course, on my own behalf. The University of Maiduguri is new but the history of the town of Maiduguri and of Borno State is ancient indeed, belonging as it does to one of most glorious epochs of our common African past. In becoming a member of your University Community today, I am happy to be thus linked to this cultural heritage.

The pleasure of being with you today, in order to receive this award, gives me this happy opportunity to share with you the special thoughts and hopes that such an event of necessity brings to mind. Naturally, here I can only speak for myself and give a very personal appreciation of what it means to be at Maiduguri today. You will understand me, therefore, when I say how specially proud I feel at having been singled out for this

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merit largely in recognition of the task it was mine to perform in New York where I served for 11 years, from 1969 to 1980, as Tanzania's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Not only in Tanzania, but in every country the world over, those of us who are chosen to represent our countries abroad are called upon at all times, and in all places, to give of our very best in the highest interests of our people in the service of whom it is our duty to work. But it would be less than honest of me if I did not say how conscious I am - and will always be - of the extra-ordinary personal privilege that was mine to have served at that unique institution, and to have been there during a decade which, as much as any other - and perhaps more than any other - reached, in the richness and variety of challenge and achievement, new heights in the field of international relations; thanks to the combined efforts of so many newly - independent nations of Africa and the Third World.

It was a true honour indeed to have been a son, among many, of Africa at the United Nations at a time when one was able to participate in, and make some contribution to, the establishment of those vital foundations of international consolidation and consequence which were the fruits of each individual African country's earlier struggle for political freedom and independence.

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That this period of service should now, in the eyes of your University, merit the signal award that you have chosen to bestow on me is a source of immense personal satisfaction. But more than this, such a recognition calls upon me to go beyond the limited aspect of personal accomplishment, whatever its value, and to consider instead the greater achievements of our collective history and of the shared struggle for African Unity and Liberation during the last decades. For it is such collective achievements alone that can give meaning and relevance to individual efforts.

In recalling your kind and generous words about me, therefore, let me accept them on behalf of all my contemporaries in the field of international affairs who were given the historical opportunity of establishing Africa's indelible presence on the widest stage of world affairs and who knew only too well that what was done at the United Nations for Africa in the 1970s was only made possible by the preconditional existence of two unshakeable certainties which we found there as solid as the ground under our feet; namely, the political consolidation effected by the newly-independent African States in the 60s and the rapid growth of African unity which was born of this consolidation.

African diplomats were able to make the presence of their countries and their continent felt at the United Nations because they

achieved a very remarkable feat in the annals of diplomacy in general - which is the ability to speak with one voice and to one purpose. We were able to do this because we all came from the same place and the same historical time, from a continent that, more than any other, had learnt to free itself from subjugation through the concrete experience of solidarity and brotherhood across thousands of miles and a variety of backgrounds.

African diplomats came, and continue to come, to the United Nations already proficient in the language of dialogue and consensus without which their freshly-freed societies at home could hardly have emerged from the years under colonial domination. And African diplomats came to the United Nations from new nation-states which had seen, very early on, the need to transcend the contours of their individual sovereignties almost as soon as they had conquered them in order to ensure their own survival as states and as a new continental force within the re-organisation of a post-independence world order. Above all, African diplomats came to the United Nations inspired by the examples of their own national leaders, the founding fathers of African Unity, who did not stop to rest on their laurels at independence, but who went on to transform their early struggle for national emancipation into a wider commitment for cooperation, organised at the continental level,

for the total political, social and economic liberation of the rest of Africa.

It was not - and it has not been - easy, this process of survival and change, this transition from colonial subject to a diplomat at the United Nations. For colonialism imposed on Africa not a pattern of unity but the reflex of fragmentation; and by its practice of divide and rule, imperialism made disunity, discord and disintegration a sine qua non for its own grip on Africa's peoples and wealth.

Yet, out of this very experience, African nations have gained the knowledge and the strength with which to cooperate and coordinate their activities as much in the international arena as in the domestic and regional spheres. In this context, let me pay particular tribute to Nigeria's own unique and special contribution, at the national level, to the establishment of genuine democratic institutions - a process which forms and regulates the lives of millions of citizens in this, the largest nation-state of Africa, and which inspires and educates so many of the rest of us on the continent.

The second and subsequent development in Africa which has made possible the success and strength of Africa's diplomatic efforts at the United Nations is the spectacular growth of African unity embodied in that other unique organization, the OAU.

The fact that Africa has its own continental organisation is in itself no great achievement. Other continents too, after all, have similar bodies of their own. The quality that distinguishes the OAU from other

such Organisations and which gives the OAU its own special political and historical dimension is its commitment to, and practice of, unity; a unity both of ideal and function.

While other continents have had to wait centuries before being able to fashion supra-national organisations out of the limitations of selfish and deeply entrenched national interests, the OAU, to the contrary, was born at the same time as the new African nations themselves and grew in strength with the addition of each new African State.

And while some continental organisations have had to contend with finding a balance between the conflicting rivalries of member states, the OAU from the outset, has been able to contain and unite such national ambitions for the common purpose of a higher aspiration - that of Africa's liberation.

The quantitative change which occurred with the increase in the number of independent African states in the 60s brought about at the same time a qualitative change in the freedom struggle in Africa as more and more African countries shouldered their commitment to support their more viciously subjugated brothers in the Portuguese colonies, in white minority-dominated Southern Africa and in apartheid South Africa itself.

This qualitative change was itself harnessed within the institutional framework of the OAU Liberation Committee so that African diplomatic efforts at the United Nations were, from the beginning, given the concrete backing of practical and strategic results from the field and from the home-front.

The subsequent backing in terms of actual coordinated planning and tactics - and let us not forget - victories - established later by the OAU through the Frontline States provided another inestimable reinforcement to African diplomacy at the United Nations.

Again, here, I would like to make special mention of the exemplary and vitally supportive role played by Nigeria at three crucial moments in the history of Southern Africa's Liberation in the context of both Continental and Regional coordination, namely; in 1975/76, at the time of the near-fatal split within the OAU over the recognition of the independence of the MPLA Government in Angola; in 1979-80, within the Frontline States' Strategy for the victorious independence struggle of Zimbabwe and since 1980, in the combined efforts of the Frontline States, the OAU and the UN concerning the current protracted and agonising diplomatic battle to obtain the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 calling for the independence of Namibia illegally occupied by South Africa.

All these developments and all these contributions have made it possible for African diplomats to have the platform they hold at the United Nations and indeed, to have the influence and strength they also



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possess elsewhere, as for example, in the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, etc.

Indeed, the manner in which African diplomats perform their unique continental duty at the United Nations, and the ways in which they coordinate, cooperate and reconcile their separate and combined interests there within the African Group can, in my opinion, rightly be called Africa's special contribution to the more superior evolution of multi-lateral diplomacy and to the conduct of international affairs at the highest level.

But let me not dwell too long on the past and its achievements; let me not give the impression that with the coming of the last stages of the Liberation struggle in Africa, African diplomacy at the United Nations, and elsewhere, is also somehow coming to the end of its useful existence. This is clearly not so. In fact the contrary promises to be the case. 1980, the year in which I left the United Nations to return home as Minister for Foreign Affairs saw the fall of the last-but one (save South Africa itself) minority regime of Southern Africa i. e. the emergence of independent Zimbabwe and the first Summit meeting at Lusaka of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC).

These two events highlighted in a very dramatic way the two issues which have come to dominate the struggle for the 80's - the

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fight for the independence of Namibia and the political freedom of South Africa as well as the fight for Africa's economic liberation as spelt out at the Lagos Economic Summit of 1981.

To promote these issues and to win these battles at the United Nations, OAU, and elsewhere will be the next task facing Africa's statesmen and diplomats in this difficult but even more decisive phase of Africa's continuing emancipation.

In a sense, both these issues, the one concerning Southern Africa's struggle against racist oppression and the other concerning the objectives of the Lagos Plan of Action, are set on the stage of Africa's economic emancipation which logically can be approached only after Africa's liberation from colonial domination. For both these struggles touch the raw nerve of imperialism, and its visceral dependence on the riches and raw materials of Africa.

It is for this reason that Namibia, for example, is being denied her rightful independence from South Africa. The struggle to keep control over Namibia's abundant wealth is currently and deliberately delaying what should have been a very straightforward United Nations plan for the independence of a former United Nations Trust Territory illegally occupied by the apartheid regime of Pretoria.

And it is certainly for the very same reason that the OAU has found itself blocked and unable to hold its regular annual Summit since the Nairobi Meeting of June 1981. For, without doubt, an organised, united, committed Africa is an enemy of those who want to continue to enslave the Southern African people and who, need especially in these times of economic recession and related crisis, Africa's untapped wealth. But more than this, the OAU is also under attack for its past successes. OAU support for all liberation movements on the continent, in general, and inside Namibia and South Africa, in particular, has been a vital pillar of support and legitimacy for African and Non-Aligned Strategies at the United Nations. The effectiveness of African and Non-Aligned diplomats in the skilled practice of organised consensus has been a major factor behind the accomplishments of the liberation struggle on the diplomatic front. It is therefore only natural that those wishing to maintain the status quo in Southern Africa should now seek to immobilise the OAU at this crucial moment and thus to divert the spear-heading action of the free African States.

This is why efforts are under way, none too subtle, to counter-act this challenge from Africa and to provoke a breakdown in the work and functioning of the OAU, and thereby to lessen the impact of OAU diplomacy at the United Nations. African leaders and representatives

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will have to call upon all their reserves of skill, experience and fore-sight to deal with and overcome this attack.

But African representatives, today, at this crucial moment, also need something more, something other than their own personal efforts. They need the collective will of their peoples and their states to rise up to the attack on their Organisation; they need the seriousness of purpose on the part of their leaders and decision-makers not to let the OAU be crippled, least of all by default and deliberate inaction. For the OAU is not merely an instrument in the hands of statesmen and diplomats; it is above all the most powerful weapon for liberation and survival in the hands of all of Africa's nations and peoples.

Let us not fail to emphasise, therefore, the collective responsibility of all Africa to preserve the OAU at this time of further success and therefore of further attack. We must all work to strengthen and reinforce the real force of the OAU which does not lie in the mere quality and number of its diplomats and flags, but in the will and the effort of its people expressed through their Governments and their political organisations.

And let me add, through their institutions of learning. The challenge to African unity, and the exigencies of Africa's liberation

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struggle must also be understood in the most profound way by Africa's universities and places of higher education. For all these institutions, where men and women think upon their past and present and where they chart their future, have their vital roles to play in the preservation of the fruits of independence and emancipation.

African Unity can never be taken for granted-; it must be created and re-created everyday in every corner of the continent. Only in this way will Africa, through her diplomats, yes, but through her national and regional organisations, above all, remain at the forefront of the struggle for a more just and peaceful international order and for the democratisation of international relations.

Mr. Vice Chancellor,
Members of the Council and Senate,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Once again, let me thank the University of Maiduguri for the extraordinary and singular honour that has been bestowed on me. I accept it in all humility and in full recognition of the fact that it is not only a generous tribute to my own modest contribution but also an acknowledgement of all the service given and all the efforts made by my country and by our great continent in the field of international understanding and cooperation on the basis of freedom, justice and human dignity.