



Address by  
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**Chairperson**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**It is indeed a pleasure for me to be at the Woodrow Wilson Centre and to share with you some of my reflections on developments in Africa. I would like to thank the organizers of this program for providing me the privilege of being here this morning.**

**I have been requested to speak on the evolution of the African Union, paying particular attention to developments and challenges of the Continental initiative as it unfolds within broader global trends. Much as this may appear to be rather a broad and descriptive theme, it is my hope that in the follow-up discussion we will be able to focus on specific issues for an in-depth exchange.**

**In my view situating the discussion within the framework of Africa's quest to achieve unity and integration can properly capture the nuances involved in a reflection about the African Union, and the challenges encountered. When perceived in this context, the milestones achieved by African**

**countries and the challenges that are confronted can perhaps be better appreciated.**

**A discussion about the African Union has to underscore three main dimensions of the initiative. First and foremost, the project is a vision of a destiny that the Continent desires to attain. Secondly, it is a vision that is operationalized through a process of integration, and in this respects manifests and encounters the challenges of integration. Thirdly, as it is the case in similar undertakings, the African Union can be realized through the construction of an appropriate institutional architecture, a process that generates its own dynamics.**

**In order to understand these three dimensions of the African Union it is useful to take a historical perspective. Such a perspective can help in asserting the fact that the African Union is not a recent initiative. Such a perspective also allows us to appreciate the achievements that have been made, and even acknowledge the mistakes committed. For us Africans, a historical perspective also offers a better way of assessing how far we have come.**

**Indeed, the awareness and quest for African unity were not born of yesterday. In fact, it was the very sense of a shared predicament that precipitated the emergence of the Pan-**

**Africanist Movement as far back as more than a century ago, in 1900. Initially, it evolved as a backlash against slavery and its aftermaths, championed by Africans in the diaspora.**

**Later, Pan-Africanism became an expression of resistance, an aspiration for peace and freedom, an end to foreign domination, a quest for unity and solidarity among the African people. If, at the beginning, to use the words of Henry Sylvester Williams, the organizer of the first Pan-African Congress that was convened in July 1900, in London, the movement was intended, "to bringing into closer touch with each other the peoples of African descent throughout the world"; by the end of the 1950s, Pan-Africanism had**

**become an instrument for liberation and emancipation of the subjugated people of the Continent.**

**The signing of the Charter forming the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1963 signified not only the creation of a Pan-African Organization, which was in itself an important achievement, but more profoundly, it also signified the crystallization of the collective vision and aspirations of the African People. The Charter underlined the centrality of uniting the people of our Continent. In the words of the Charter, there was "a common determination to promote understanding among our peoples and cooperation among our states in response to the aspirations for**



**brotherhood and solidarity, in a larger unity transcending ethnic and national differences." The Charter was not merely a founding legal instrument for an Inter-Governmental Organization, but a living statement intended to encapsulate the idea of a united African people.**

**The immediate challenge at the formation of the OAU was to consolidate the dynamic force that had emerged with the independence of African countries so as to liberate the entire Continent from the yoke of colonialism and apartheid. For two decades the OAU took as its main mission the anti-colonial struggle and providing support and rear base to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Governments and**

people of Africa were fully galvanized in the prosecution of the struggle. The OAU was also an important vehicle for the mobilization of the international support and solidarity so essential for the realization of this objective.

By the 1980s, the momentum for independence had gathered pace with the majority of African countries having gained their independence. At the same time, the experience of pursuing strategies of development had revealed that in the two decades during which the newly independent countries had initiated major transformations in the political, social and economic sectors, the fragmented economies and the lack of linkages among national systems and in some



**cases wrong policies and priorities were acting as a fetter for rapid and sustainable development for the people of Africa.**

**During this period our Continent entered into a severe economic crisis that begun to undermine most of the achievements gained in the first two decades of independence. All these factors underlined the need for having a concerted effort among African countries in addressing the Continent's economic problems. These concerted efforts included the need for fostering closer cooperation and integration, among African countries, particularly in the socio-economic domain.**

**In June 1991 the Heads of State and Government met in Abuja, Nigeria and signed the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community – otherwise known as the 'Abuja Treaty.**

**The objective of the Community is to promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of African economies in order to increase economic self-reliance and promote an indigenous and self-sustained development. The Treaty provides for the Community to be established gradually in 6 stages of variable duration over a transitional period not exceeding 34 years. It also recognizes the**

## **Regional Economic Communities as the building blocs of the African Economic Community.**

**The Treaty entered into force in 1994 after acquiring the necessary ratifications, and the subsequent 5 years were devoted to accomplishing the objectives of the first phase of its implementation – which basically involved the consolidation and rationalization of the Regional Economic Communities. By 1999, every region had an Economic Community focusing on different aspects of development, and every OAU Member State belonged to one Regional Economic Community or more. The Communities include: SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS, ECCAS and UMA.**

**It is against this background and the impact of fundamental changes that had taken place in the world that the 4<sup>th</sup> Extra-Ordinary Summit of the OAU adopted on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1999 the Sirte Declaration which pronounced the decision to establish the African Union.**

**The Declaration specifically reiterates and reaffirms the essence of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and calls for its accelerated implementation by shortening the period of bringing it into being, speedily establishing all its institutions, and the strengthening and consolidation of the Regional Economic**

**Communities; In institutional terms, the operationalization of the decision involved the preparation of a legal instrument that is acceptable to all the Member States. This involved clearly articulating objectives and principles of the Organization; delineating its authority, functions, structures and regulations, all of which entailed addressing the fundamental question of what kind of union is being desired. This, indeed, provoked a debate that is reminiscent of the challenging discourse preceding the formation of the OAU.**

**There were those who took the position that time is ripe for establishing a United States of Africa in which we vest our collective sovereignty to a higher body of the Union and**

**remove the boundaries imposed by colonialism and all the attendant structures. And, just as before, there were others who advocated for more gradual approach, while preserving the boundaries and national sovereignty.**

**The Constitutive Act that was finally adopted at the Lome Summit in July 2000 represents the most common denominator between those two positions, while at the same time allowing for the ultimate realization of the highest form of integration.**

**By the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2001, at the 5<sup>th</sup> Extra-Ordinary Summit held in Sirte, Libya, all the OAU Member States had signed**



**the Constitutive Act, many had also ratified it, and only a few ratifications were remaining to allow for its entry into force. The Summit also approved the Protocol establishing the Pan-African Parliament, which is among the institutions of the African Union. By April 25<sup>th</sup> 2001, the required 2/3<sup>rd</sup> ratifications were obtained, and one month later, the Constitutive Act entered into force. On 9<sup>th</sup> July 2002, n the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government formally launched the African Union, in Durban, South Africa.**

**The speed and enthusiasm demonstrated in approving and ratifying the legal instrument of the African Union was an indication of the commitment and determination to**

achieving a closer unity among African people. The important question, at this juncture, is – in what way does the African Union enhance the achievements of the OAU and overcome its shortcomings.

Evidently, it enhances the integration process in a number of ways. In the first place, it eliminates the separation between the OAU as established by the Charter of 1963, and the African Economic Community that was established by the Abuja Treaty of 1991. The existence of this superfluous institutional distinction tended to perpetuate the disconnection between the political and economic programme of the Continental agenda. The Constitutive Act,

together with the initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) forge a synchronized strategic orientation thus pooling all resources together and provide for a concerted action.

It is in this regard that the African Union broadens the scope of integration even though it allows for the maintenance of inherited boundaries and the individual sovereignty of Member States. The provision for the establishment of financial institutions and the allowance for the Union to intervene in Member States in some circumstances have introduced a progressive dimension to Continental relations transcending the disparate national spheres of authority in

**critical domains. Similarly, the incorporation into the Constitutive Act of important elements such as peace, security and stability; democratization; human rights; rule of law, promotion of gender equality, science and technology revitalizes the Continental agenda and broadens the space of integration.**

**Indeed the commitment of the AU leaders to work together towards a peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts – both intra state and interstate is a reaffirmation and confirmation of the decisions taken by the OAU. It is a collective response to the horror of escalating conflicts with their devastating consequences. It also represents a clear**

**message that it is unacceptable for us to be perceived as a continent prone to endemic violence and where peace, security, stability and development are but a distant possibility. It represents a clear undertaking that peace, security and stability are a collective responsibility of the Africans and that it cannot be left to the idiosyncrasies of individual societies in the name of national sovereignty.**

**The African Union, in this respect, is neither a completely new Organization nor is it simply a change of name and designation. It builds from the accomplishments of the OAU and creates an elevated, dynamic and engaging framework**

**for fostering closer unity and solidarity among the African people.**

**The new framework accentuates the Continental space *vis-à-vis* the national space. The competence of the African Union is much broader and the institutional structures that have been provided for – establish a dynamic framework for providing vision, leadership and decision-making; for ensuring technical oversight and guidance; and for maintaining effective engagement and implementation in all spheres of the Continent’s development.**



**It is now slightly more than five years since the Sirte Declaration of 1999. At the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assembly of the African Union three weeks ago some leaders expressed concern over the slow pace of consolidating the Union. Several important Organs have not yet been established, the Commission Secretariat is still enhancing its capacities, and the spectre of conflict is still haunting some of our countries. All this demonstrates that together with the high commitment and strong determination, there are still challenges that have to be surmounted for the full vision of the Union to be realized. Let me briefly refer to some of these.**

**One of the formidable challenges is that of anchoring of the whole project within the initiatives and everyday activities and interests of the African people. Indeed, the African Union is not simply an undertaking of Heads of State and Government. Neither is it a responsibility of the Commission Secretariat or those of the Regional Economic Communities. The project involves all of the African people as a collective – whether it is the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture; the Confederation of Labors; Farmers Cooperatives; Youth, Women and Intellectual Organizations – all of us are stakeholders in this undertaking, and therefore we need to take ownership and engage ourselves in strategies of promoting closer interaction for our common good.**

**In the OAU's 39 years of existence, the people have identified with its vision and mission. In the past four decades of my diplomatic career and especially during the twelve years that I served as the Organization's Secretary General, I have had the privilege of traveling across the Continent meeting with ordinary Africans from all walks of life. A consistent message I received from them was that the Continental body had to be more engaging in all the domains of Africa's development. People were expecting more from the OAU in promoting their interaction and in addressing their every day problems. They considered the Continental Organization to be a legitimate actor in their daily existence.**

**Yet despite the expectations, the OAU had not succeeded to sufficiently involve the ordinary Africans in its activities. This is a deficiency that had weakened the effectiveness of the organization. By allowing it to become a preoccupation that essentially concerned African heads of State and their governments, the OAU lost a major component that would have reinvigorated its dynamism. It is my considered view that, a closely involved civil society into the affairs of the continental organization would have enhanced its accountability, revitalized its role and reinforced its impact in the continent.**

**The architects of the African Union have recognized the paramount importance of this factor right at the inception of the Organization. Embedded within the structures of the Union is a strong component of people's participation, through their representatives in the Pan-African Parliament and through their civic organizations in the Economic, Social and Cultural Council. Furthermore, the role of the people has been given prominence in the pronouncements of African leaders on the African Union and in the various details issued by the Commission of the AU. A major challenge is how to operationalize this cardinal principle and to ensure that the people are effectively engaged in the integration process. The launching of the key people's Organs such as the Pan-**



**African Parliament and the ECOSOC provides an opportunity for a closer involvement of the people, at least through their direct representatives in the affairs of the Union..**

**In all these matters, leadership plays a critical role. For the project of African unity to recapture its popular base, African leadership has to rekindle the Pan-African spirit. In each and every African citizen and leader, a commitment to African unity has to be inculcated. Continental interests have to supersede short-term national concerns. Selflessness, statesmanship and larger vision have to be the hallmarks of leadership. It is such a leadership that can give a progressive interpretation to the Constitutive Act which, on the one**



hand, reaffirms the principle of respecting borders existing on achievement of independence and the principle of non-interference by any Member States in the internal affairs of another, and on the other hand, provides for the establishment of supranational financial institutions, and allows for the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

With all those commitments and determination, the structures for African Unity cannot be put in place without adequate resources. The secretariat of the New Partnership

**for African Development (NEPAD) had earlier computed that close to US\$64 billion, in various forms, is needed annually to maintain a growth rate of 7% for the Continent and to provide a strong basis for poverty eradication and good governance. I believe that the Commission of the African Union may also come up with a substantial resource requirement for operationalizing the 17 Organs provided for in the Constitutive Act and for running the requisite Union programmes. It is not been easy to mobilize such resources, both externally and more so internally.**

**The issue of Africa's poverty has been given more attention in the recent months. Concrete commitment has been given**

to the issue of debt cancellation. While Africa looks forward, with appreciation, for the execution of the pledges made, we all know that more is needed, not only with regard to debt, but more importantly on the issues of trade and development assistance. Africa is committed to take its responsibilities on putting its house in order. Reforms are being taken in earnest in the areas of democracy, governance, human rights, conflict resolution, transparency and economic management. This is not to claim that these are universally applied in the continent. Far from that, for example it is common knowledge that incidents and in some cases disturbing ones of serious violation of human rights continue to prevail in some countries. Clearly more needs to

be done, but at least it can be said that many African countries are on course.

On the issue of resources, more creativity and resourcefulness is needed on how to advance African Unity without being impeded by the financial crunch. Africa has to rely more on its human, institutional, and natural resources for realizing its vision. However, the rest of the world, particularly the developed world has to realize that the misery of Africa engenders suffering not only the African people but does impact on human development as a whole.

**It is true that Africa is still ravaged by conflicts, poverty and weak political institutions. It is equally true that the communication networks are still externally oriented and social identities remain narrower. Nevertheless, the various initiatives taken to overcome these constraints have reaffirmed that only through united action can these obstacles be surmounted. African people have to achieve unity both as a way of realizing their full existence as a people, and more immediately, as means of overcoming their impediments. Indeed, the full potential of an individual African, and individual nation cannot be harnessed within the confines of the locality and or separate boundaries. It requires the maximum breath of the Continent's ensemble of**

**resources, institutions and traditions for any African to be a full African.**

**In the same regard, it has become quite evident lately that each region of the world is so much preoccupied with its own affairs that it is imprudent to rely on others in solving problems. While paying tribute to Britain's response to the plight of the people of Sierra Leone, and recognizing the important support given by the United States, the European Union and others in the efforts of the African Union in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, it has not been easy to involve our Western partners in active peace keeping in our Continent. Similarly, the recent global**



**discussions from Doha, Monterrey, Kananaskis to Cancun, and the pledges for financing African development are a sober reminder that global partnership is not as amiable as the rhetoric sounds. It is only through pulling the Continent collective efforts that a strong basis can be established. Unity is the only rational option for Africa.**

**Having said that however, it is important to recognize that the reinvigorated quest for unity, as symbolized by the decision to establish the African Union, coincides with the intensification of the process of globalization, which also has its own implications.**

**In this respect, while Africa cannot but endeavor to position itself and maximize the benefits of globalization, vigorous pursuit is needed in overcoming some of negative consequences fostered by this global force.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**In its short existence, the AU Peace and Security Council which is a successor to the OAU's mechanism for conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, has already demonstrated that it is determined to act more decisively in dealing with conflicts that have caused so much havoc and destruction in our continent. For while the OAU had since**

the Cairo Summit decision of 1993 been taking steps to confront this scourge its actions were limited in terms of impact. The deployment of AU military and security personnel in Burundi, its intervention in Darfur crisis including the dispatch of thousands of troops which are in the process of being augmented as well as the Organization's readiness to send AU forces into the Eastern DRC as well as Somalia testify to an enhanced commitment on the part of Africa through its Peace and Security Council.

The support given by Africa's international partners has been pivotal in facilitating these actions by the AU which have also been made possible by clear mandate enshrined in the

**Constitutive Act of the African Union. Yet it must be stated that this support which is highly appreciated, is still not commensurate with the requirements of the situation. Africa's political will to forge ahead in dealing decisively with conflicts continue to be hamstrung by logistical and financial difficulties. The pace of deployment in Darfur is largely attributed to this. Last Friday I was in Addis Ababa discussing with the Chairperson of the African Commission and his colleagues concerning the preparations for the forthcoming Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks on Darfur scheduled for the end of August. I was made more aware of these difficulties including the efforts which are currently**

being made to get the necessary financial resources for the Peace Talks!!

The notion of the global village that is now in currency derives from African traditions. In its indigenous sense, a village is not simply a small human settlement. Rather, it is a social organism, characterized by fraternity and collective concern. No one part of a true village can be allowed to languish in misery while the other part basks in affluence. #

The global village should not lose this cardinal principle of its primogenitor. The quest for African unity needs to be complemented by earnest efforts to streamline global relations so that inclusiveness is enhanced.

# FURTHERMORE, THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED CONCERNS AND SOLIDARITY IS ALL THE MORE RELEVANT AND URGENT AS WE FACE MAJOR CRISES AND THREATS BOTH NATURAL AND MAN MADE INCLUDING THE AIDS PANDEMIC AND THE SCOURGE OF TERRORISM.

**Finally, I am of the firm belief that all these challenges confronting Africa right now are not insurmountable. Despite the emerging divergent contours, global trends at this conjuncture tend to favour closer linkages and the formation of larger units. Africa should harness this advantage of globalization and steer it towards realizing the people's vision of establishing an effective African Union. There is no other rational choice for the people of our Continent than that of enhancing their cooperation and integration.**



**The vision is clear, the architecture is being constructed, and a momentum has been unleashed. Africa cannot afford to fail.**

**I thank you!**