

MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MOBUTU:
ROQUEBRUNE CAP. SAINT MARTIN (FRANCE)
FRIDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 1996
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1. President Mobutu of Zaire granted audience to the Secretary-General of the OAU, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, on Friday, 29 November 1996 at 11.50 am in his private residence in Roquebrune Cap Saint Martin (France). The audience took place in the presence of the Director of the President's Cabinet and his Personal Secretary. The OAU Secretary General was accompanied by his Chief of Cabinet, Mr. SAID DJINNIT.

2. From the outset, the Secretary-General stated that he had sought, through the Zairian Foreign Minister, in New York for the UN General Assembly (in September or early October) to meet with President Mobutu, but things had not materialized until now. President Mobutu, on his part, stated that he had also wanted to meet with the Secretary-General some 1½ months back. He further reported that his doctors had done a good job and that his convalescence was proceeding smoothly.

3. The discussions between President Mobutu and Secretary-General Salim focused mainly on the situation in Zaire with specific emphasis on developments in the Eastern region of that country. In that respect, Secretary-General Salim expressed his deep concern and that of the OAU in general over what was happening in the Great Lakes Region of the Continent. A lot of efforts, he added, had been made with the Summit in Nairobi (Kenya), the Central Organ Session in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in addition to the Ministers and other Heads of State who had been to see President Mobutu in the effort to deal with and possibly resolve the crisis. According to Secretary-General Salim, the OAU was attached to the unity, cohesion and territorial integrity of Zaire. Zaire was not just any other country, he added. In the ranking of African Countries, Zaire would be in the same position as Nigeria and South Africa. If its security and stability were therefore to be in jeopardy, it would have enormous consequences and implications far beyond the region. Africa supported the integrity and unity as well as respect for the borders of Zaire, the Secretary-General concluded.

4. Clearly, Secretary-General Salim continued, Zaire was facing problems and President Mobutu had a central role to play in ensuring that stability and security were restored in the country. He reminded the President that some three years back when both of them had met in Gbadolite, Zaire, he (the Secretary-General) had briefed

him on his encounter with US Senators and Congressmen in Washington. On that occasion, he (Secretary-General Salim) had emphasized the central role of President Mobutu in ensuring that the political transition in Zaire was carried through smoothly and effectively. Current developments in Zaire, Secretary-General concluded, provided further testimony to the need for Mobutu to play such a role. Clearly, President Mobutu's health was a factor that needed to be considered. It was only when the President was be in good health that he would be able to help.

5. According to Secretary-General Salim, there was no need to go into specific details. Africa and the international community wanted to help ensure not only the immediate but also the long term unity and stability of Zaire and, in this respect, President Mobutu had a central and important role to play. The OAU would really want President Mobutu to supervise the process not only as the President of Zaire but also as the Doyen of African Heads of State.

6. For his part, President Mobutu started off by reminding Secretary-General Salim that they had known each other for years. Since the crisis ("so to speak"), what had embittered the President of Zaire was the fact that undue advantage had been taken of his illness and absence abroad to "stick a dagger in his back". He swore that this would never have happened if he had been back in Zaire. He would not have been the one to sit back in the Presidential Palace in Kinshasa while the crisis was unfolding. He would indeed have been on the spot at the war-front. Further, President Mobutu added, he had analyzed the entire situation, including the military aspects, and had come to the conclusion that there was indeed need to avoid war. President Mobutu sated unequivocally that he was not a war-monger. This was a view he had conveyed to all those who had come to see him in Roquebrune Cap St. Martin. Beyond that, as the doyen of the Heads of State, he had to show an example of wisdom. The point now was to see how the Heads of State could put an end to the current crisis which could not and should not be allowed to drag on indefinitely.

7. President Mobutu also stated unequivocally that he intended to go back to Zaire after the period of convalescence. His main objective would be to ensure that the integrity and unity of Zaire was preserved because this was what he had sworn to do. He hoped that things would be or were on the right path. He had accepted a ceasefire which would be followed by discussions. In his view, a distinction had to be made between the relations between Zaire and its neighbours on the one hand and,

on the other, between Zaire and its citizens. According to President Mobutu, Zaire definitely had its own share of responsibility and guilt in what was happening in the region. His intention therefore was to restore order in Zaire and, subsequently, to live in peace with his neighbours. He vowed that he was saying so as a Head of State, soldier and Christian.

8. Secretary-General Salim confirmed that President Mobutu was indeed a Head of State, a soldier and a Christian. However, beyond that, he was also an elder statesman and the doyen of the Heads of State. Such a position confers certain responsibilities on him i.e. his own personal role in promoting peace, security and stability in Zaire, but also beyond in Africa for now and for posterity. The Secretary-General repeated that his intention was not to go into details but rather to assure President Mobutu (a) that he, personally, and Africa, in general, wished him a speedy recovery; (b) that the contribution of Zaire to the OAU was highly valued; and (c) that Africa fully stood by Zaire's territorial integrity, unity, sovereignty and cohesion.

9. Secretary-General Salim reminded President Mobutu that he (the Secretary General) had come to Zaire in the heat of the crisis in that country. At the time, President Mobutu had told him that the crisis in Zaire would and could only be resolved by the people of Zaire themselves. However, Zaire welcomed the support and contribution of Africa in this endeavour. As recent events have shown, the Secretary-General continued, the international community had not been able to act swiftly in dealing with the situation. Mention had, for instance, been made of 200,000 refugees or of 600,000 refugees. There was debate on issues of mandate and other details while people were dying in the region. In the view of the Secretary-General, the current crisis should, to some extent, serve as a lesson to Africa. The Secretary-General further stated that he harboured, no doubts as to President Mobutu's will and determination to work for stability in Zaire and for good relations with its neighbours.

10. There was no doubt, Secretary-General Salim stated, that, in Zaire today, there were those who pursued or advocated an isolationist or separatist approach. Clearly, in his view, this would be the wrong approach or direction for Zaire to pursue. The Secretary-General concluded that all those who have had to dwell on the crisis in Zaire including the cynics had indeed come to the conclusion that President Mobutu

was an important, unifying factor in Zaire. This was one reason why almost everyone was praying for his speedy recovery so that he could help in the search for a solution.

11. Secretary-General Salim reminded President Mobutu that he had on more than one occasion spoken in his favour at a time when it was not easy to do so. His plea therefore was for the President to use his influence in ensuring peace, stability and unity in Zaire. But beyond that, the President was also required to use his wisdom in creating conditions that would sustain such an environment in Zaire not only today, but also for future generations.

12. Secretary-General Salim drew the President's attention to the fact that he (the President), had embarked on the process of transition in Zaire. It was important, he added, for the President to supervise the smooth and successful conclusion of the process. Elections, the Secretary-General stated, had been scheduled for 1997 and the assistance and support of the UN, OAU and the international community had been sought in pursuit of this endeavour. He took the opportunity to assure President Mobutu of the support and assistance of the OAU. The elections should be held as planned, he opined.

13. Secretary-General Salim wished the President a speedy recovery and expressed the hope that he would be able to return to Zaire as soon as possible. Indeed, he added, the very presence of President Mobutu in Zaire would have a salutary effect. "Even your detractors," Secretary-General stated, "have acknowledged the crucial role that you have to play in Zaire." It is relevant to talk about democracy and good governance. However, both factors clearly could not exist in circumstances of instability, chaos and disunity.

14. Secretary-General Salim further stated that it was no secret that Zaire was a country with different ethnic groups, cultures and regions. The challenge facing the leadership in Zaire was to ensure that all these groups could live together in a greater whole. The unity of Zaire was important because it was in the interest of Africa to have a strong and powerful country working in concert with the rest of the continent.

15. In this respect, Secretary-General Salim reminded President Mobutu of their encounter three years earlier during which he had conveyed his esteem and

respect for him. It was important, the Secretary-General stated, for President Mobutu to think of the type of legacy he (the President) would want to bequeath to Zaire. Africa and OAU, he concluded, would want a legacy of a strong, peaceful and united Zaire which would be the pride of the Continent.

16. In reaction to all the comments of Secretary-General Salim, President Mobutu stated that he had (without flattery) been most moved and satisfied with their discussions. If the hand of God could be brought to bear, the President added, he would bless and ensure that their joint endeavour was successful. This was the message, he (President Mobutu) had conveyed to all those who had come to see him including President Lissouba of Congo, Vice President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and other special envoys. He was not a warmonger, President Mobutu repeated. His message was one of peace and democracy. Mistakes had been made. These were a thing of the past.

17. The audience ended at 12.45 pm.

Roland Ngong
Conference Division