



**Organization of African Unity**

**STATEMENT BY  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,  
AT THE OPENING OF THE 72<sup>ND</sup> ORDINARY SESSION  
OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**06 July 2000  
Lome, Togo**

**STATEMENT BY THE OAU SECRETARY-GENERAL  
6 JULY 2000**

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Your Excellency Prime Minister of the Republic of Togo,  
Mr. Eugene Koffi Adoboli,

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

Distinguished UN Assistant Secretary-General for  
Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahima Fall,

Distinguished Deputy Executive Secretary of the United  
Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Ms. Lalla Ben  
Barka,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to join the Prime Minister of the Republic of Togo in extending a warm welcome to you all, at this 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of Council of Ministers of our Continental Organization. I wish to thank the Prime Minister for being able to join us on this occasion and for the statement that he has just delivered. I believe I am speaking for all of you in conveying sincere gratitude through him to the Government and People of Togo for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful city of Lomé.

Indeed, Lomé has, once again, taken up the noble responsibility of hosting deliberations of great significance for the people of our Continent. We do recall the several occasions that this city had become a point of convergence for important negotiations and agreements on matters of our Continent's partnership and relationships in the quest of achieving economic development, and also in the search for peace and stability in the Continent. Among such encounters have been those which culminated in the ACP-EU Lome Convention and more recently, the Lome Peace Accord on Sierra Leone. We are therefore looking forward to our stay in Lome in the confident hope that our deliberations will be crowned with success.

I should now like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Honourable Thomas Motsoahae Thabane, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Lesotho. During his tenure of chairmanship, he performed his duties with commitment and exemplary skill. He made effective use of his experience, his disarming charm and sense of humour in order to overcome some difficult situations in the course of Council's deliberations at different stages. I particularly appreciated the cooperation and support that he had extended to the

General Secretariat in the discharge of our collective responsibilities. Needless to say, I look forward to working equally closely with the incoming Chairperson of Council.

**Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

This session of Council is taking place amidst difficult circumstances and profound challenges for our Continent and our peoples as well as for the OAU itself. The ugly scourge of conflict continues to ravage the Continent despite the ardent efforts exerted by our Leaders and peoples. Almost a decade since we conceived the idea of establishing a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, African people continue to suffer and die, and in some cases, in a gruesome manner due to divergences of ideals, perspectives, and even differences of identities.

The phenomenon of protracted and recurrent conflict has almost become part and parcel of the polity in some parts of our Continent. Sustainable peace continues to elude us and the persistence of conflict and even anarchy in some societies is almost numbing our sensitivity to the sanctity of

life. We continue to observe the bestiality of mutilation as a facet of war, including that of women and infants; the kidnapping and holding as hostages of the very people whose role it is to assist in peace keeping.

Poverty continues to menace our people, despite the resolute and sometimes painful measures aimed at overcoming this deplorable situation. Not only are we having difficulties creating robust and competitive economies, but even a sustainable improvement of the welfare of our people is yet unattained, despite the abundance of human and natural resources in the Continent. All this is happening while the threat of marginalization continues to loom in this globalizing world, and the expected support from our partners seems not to be forthcoming at sufficient levels.

I observed, during my address to Council in its last session, that the situation is further compounded by the frequent recurrence of natural disasters. As we were meeting last March, we were experiencing the devastation of floods in Southern Africa, especially in Mozambique. As we are meeting now, people in the Horn of Africa and in some parts of East Africa are suffering and dying of drought and famine. The common denominator in both cases is our incapacity to respond promptly and effectively.

As we are faced with these difficulties and challenges, it is gratifying to observe that some of our efforts are beginning to bear positive results. The success in reaching an agreement on cessation of hostilities in the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia is an achievement of great significance during this year that we have declared to be one of Peace, Security and Solidarity. The Agreement signed in Algiers under the auspices of the Current Chairman of the OAU, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, is not only an important step in arresting the suffering, death and destruction experienced by the people of these two sisterly countries, but has also an important bearing in promoting peace and stability in the region and in the continent as a whole. We are determined to work with both Ethiopia and Eritrea together with our partners in the Peace Process in order to sustain this significant development and to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement.

The collective efforts deployed in addressing the conflict in Sierra Leone, and the exemplary leadership provided by the ECOWAS is a source of encouragement and pride to all of us. The solidarity demonstrated in mobilizing international support and in resisting the forces which are determined to inflict terror, mayhem and destruction on the people of Sierra

Leone and flout with impunity the provisions of the Lome Agreement is a further testimony that the leadership and the people of our Continent are fully committed to take their responsibilities in the promotion of peace, security and stability in the Continent.

At the same time, the impressive strides being made by the Regional Economic Communities in pursuing the Continental aspiration for closer cooperation and integration provide hope and satisfaction. Advances made in creating free trade areas and monetary zones among our Regional Economic Communities, and the efforts being deployed in coordinating sectoral activities are encouraging.

Similarly, the unity and cohesiveness that we have succeeded to maintain in international fora have reasserted our role globally. During the last two years, there has been a mutual recognition on the need to organize special high-level consultations between our Continent and some of our prominent partners, including the United States, France, Europe, Japan, and preparations are underway for an Africa-China forum. Invariably, the outcome of these fora has been to promote a greater understanding of Africa's concerns and interests in the context of global interaction.

While we can take some satisfaction and even pride in the efforts made and the success so far achieved, we must also face the dim reality that in some cases, we have faced serious setbacks even as we believed that success was on the horizon. Here, I have especially in mind the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo where efforts towards the implementation of the Lusaka Agreement have been undermined by frequent violations of the cease-fire and impediments in organizing an Inter-Congolese Dialogue. The slow response of the United Nations in the deployment of the much-desired peace-keeping force has also not helped matters. The recent fighting in Kisangani between Rwandan and Ugandan forces was the most serious, unfortunate and obviously disturbing development. Not only did this incomprehensible fighting result in the death and injury of hundreds of innocent Congolese civilians, but it also came at a serious juncture in the peace process in Congo and constituted a risk of undermining the progress in the peace process made so far.

In this context, I welcome the Agreement reached between Presidents Museveni of Uganda and Kagame of Rwanda in their most recent meeting in Entebbe and ardently hope that there will be no recurrence of fighting between the armed



forces of the two countries in the sovereign territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

**Mr. Chairman,**

As we view the developments in the Continent and consider the profound challenges which have to be surmounted, the necessity of strengthening and reinvigorating our Unity, cohesion and solidarity is self-evident. In this respect, the call for the creation of the African Union and the acceleration of the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, including the establishment of the African Parliament stand out in importance and urgency. Consequently, one of the most important tasks before this Council is the consideration of recommendations emerging from the Ministerial meeting which was held in Tripoli and which was preceded by meetings of Legal Experts and Parliamentarians. I am confident that Council will consider these recommendations, address some of the outstanding issues, such as requirements of the transitional period between the existing OAU Charter and entry into force of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Consideration of these questions and others that may arise in the course of your deliberations on this vital subject will, I am confident, lead Council to forward recommendations to our Heads of State and Government

that will provide a solid foundation for the Union and its basic institutions.

**Mr. Prime Minister**

**Excellencies**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have fervently committed ourselves to increase the development of our economies. We have set our vision on eradicating conflicts and securing permanent peace, security and stability in the Continent. And now we are seriously organizing ourselves to achieving the vision of our Founding Fathers of creating an African Union. The basic objective in all these efforts is to improve the wellbeing of the African people and allow them to live in conditions of peace and security.

Yet there is a major threat that is causing immense suffering to our communities and killing our people in millions. I am here referring to the HIV-AIDS pandemic, that has been wreaking havoc in the Continent. This pandemic is devastating huge parts of our Continent. It is reducing life expectancy dramatically. All the gains of increased life expectancy in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been wiped out at a stroke. In many African countries,

particularly in central and southern Africa, a school child can expect a shorter life than his or her grandparents. HIV-AIDS is striking at the most productive age group - young adults - crippling our efforts at development and economic growth. It is striking down huge numbers in crucial occupations, including teachers, civil servants, business people, medical professionals in the prime of their life. The damage to the social fabric is immense.

It is more than twenty years since we recognized this havoc in our midst. We need to accept that HIV-AIDS is a crisis of terrible proportions, in magnitude and dimension. Necessary urgent steps to mobilize the whole society in the fight against the disease have to be taken. Indeed, when reference is made to it as being a pandemic, it underscores the fact that we have to acknowledge that extra-ordinary human and institutional capacities are needed to combat this disease.

We must recognize the AIDS pandemic in our Continent for what it is: a serious threat to our people and our Continent. Extraordinary measures are, therefore, needed to meet this extraordinary challenge. All our efforts as a Continent have, over the years, been geared towards the betterment of our people in political, economical and social domains, including

in such areas as the better protection of human rights and good governance in our societies, and are all intended to improve the lot of our people and the quality of their lives. Our efforts in conflict prevention, management and resolution, our endeavour to foster economic cooperation and integration and all other multi-faceted activities undertaken at the national, sub-regional and continental levels are focused on that objective. Yet if we do not contain the AIDS pandemic, all our efforts will not only be undermined, but, in some cases, will come to naught. For the fact remains that already more people have died and even more orphaned as a result of this pandemic, than as a consequence of a combination of natural and man-made disasters in our Continent. Let me emphasize, therefore, what we need to combat this pandemic are extraordinary measures.

The best analogy I can think of are those measures we come up with in war situations. We all know that in such situations, the whole society is urgently mobilized and national resources are then made available on a priority basis to enable the country to defend itself. Specific logistical and security arrangements are put in place to involve every household, district and region. In combating the HIV-AIDS pandemic, the number one killer disease in

the Continent, we need to operate in similar mode and with even greater determination. Put succinctly, we need to enter into a total combat mode in order to fight the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Nothing less is expected of us. Nothing less will suffice. That is why I am gratified that one of the burning issues to be addressed during the Lome Summit of our Organization will be the AIDS pandemic so that we come up with practical measures aimed at involving every corner of the Continent and incorporating all segments of society in this struggle for survival.

I thank you.