

ORGANIZATION OF
AFRICAN UNITY

ORGANIZAÇÃO DA
UNIDADE AFRICANA



ORGANISATION DE
L'UNITE AFRICAINE

منظمة الوحدة الافريقية

13

Addis Ababa - Ethiopia - Box 3243 Tel. 51 77 00 Telex 21046 Fax (2511) 51 78 44

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
66th ORDINARY SESSION
Harare, Zimbabwe
26 May - 30 ~~June~~, 1997
May

STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
OAU SECRETARY GENERAL

**Your Excellency Mr. Simon Muzenda,
Vice President of the Republic
of Zimbabwe,
Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers and
Heads of Delegation,
H.E. Mr. K.Y. Amoako,
UN Under-Secretary General and
Executive Secretary of the ECA,
Mr. Ibrahim Fall,
UN Assistant Secretary General for
Political Affairs
Mr. Mohamed Zekeria Ismail,
Deputy Secretary General for Political
Affairs of the League of Arab States,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to join the authorities of the host country in welcoming you all to Harare on the occasion of the convening of the Sixty-sixth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers. I also wish to thank the Government and people of Zimbabwe for the warm welcome and hospitality which they have extended to us since our arrival.

In coming to Harare, we also celebrate freedom for Southern Africa and Africa generally. Indeed, the independence of Zimbabwe is testimony to the struggle and resilience of the people of this country and to the unity of the Continent as it stood together against racism and colonialism. We honour those who paid the supreme sacrifice for the

freedom of this country and our Continent. The holding of these OAU Sessions here in Harare is also a recognition of the tremendous role being played by the Government and people of Zimbabwe in meeting the new and varied challenges that currently face our Continent and its Organization - the OAU.

I wish to seize this opportunity to express my appreciation to H.E. Omar Mustafa Al-Muntasser, Secretary of the Peoples Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Arab Libyan Jamahiriya, Chairman of the Sixty-fifth Ordinary Session of Council, as well as to the other members of the outgoing Bureau. After the very able leadership which our brother Al Muntasser provided during the deliberations of Council, I am looking forward to the chairmanship of the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of our host country, our brother Dr. Stan Mudenge.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three days ago, we celebrated here in Harare, the Thirty-fourth Anniversary of the Founding of the Organization of African Unity. It is a happy coincidence that the present session of Council is being held under these most auspicious circumstances. This meeting of Ministers of Foreign

Affairs who have converged here from all over the Continent, to deliberate on important issues of common concern is therefore of particular significance to all of us. It is indeed an opportunity to pay homage and honour to the memory of the Founding Fathers of our Organization for their vision, commitment and courage, as well as their invaluable contribution to the cause of our people and Continent, in providing them with such a unique instrument for forging unity and solidarity amongst themselves and for promoting cooperation and progress. As we meet here also, we should recall with pride, the heroic contribution of our peoples, their resilience and sacrifices in pursuit of the noble objectives enshrined in the Charter of our Continental Organization and for the freedom and dignity of the African.

This is an occasion to pay tribute to our Founding Fathers for the legacy they have bestowed on us. It is a legacy of unity, a legacy of solidarity and cooperation. This has stood the test of time. We have learnt from experience that Africa has been able to achieve its goals when it stood together in unity and solidarity and acted in unison within the framework of the Organization of African Unity.

As an Organization born out of solidarity, the OAU has remained the collective expression of our unity and a vehicle for the promotion of our solidarity. Within the OAU, we have strength in our diversity and a common identity as Africans. Today, as Africans we should

be proud that the Organization has continued to be a forum for the advancement of our collective endeavours and has made significant progress despite the difficulties and obstacles it has had to face. We should equally feel proud for having been associated in one way or another with this major African undertaking and for having brought our continental Organization to where it is today.

Today, our Organization is rallying greater support amongst Africans who are showing more interest in its activities. At times, our people may criticize the Organization for not doing enough, but they are not indifferent to it. Our Member States on their part, are demonstrating continued trust and commitment to the Organization, its principles, ideals and objectives. The most recent trend exhibited by our Member States to honour their financial obligations to the Organization, is an eloquent demonstration of that commitment. I see in this renewed commitment a further demonstration of their faith in our continental Organization and a reflection of their high expectation for it to deliver. It is, therefore, with a profound sense of recognition and appreciation that as Secretary General, I wish to put on record my thanks to our Member States for their financial contributions. In doing so, I am indeed conscious of the sacrifices they have to make to honour their obligations towards the OAU. As a result of this commitment and sacrifice, our Organization, is today a vibrant institution. It is an institution which is increasingly becoming dynamic and gaining

respect within the international community. Our Organization has managed to evolve an Agenda based on a clear determination of the needs of the Continent in a changing global environment.

In 1991, our leaders undertook a historical commitment when they decided to establish the African Economic Community as a framework for furthering and promoting the solidarity, unity and cooperation of the peoples of our Continent. This community was conceived as a collective endeavour - one to be pursued gradually based on the regional economic groupings. Since the entry into force of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, the agenda for integration, has gained momentum within our Organization. This was evidenced by the convening of the first ever session of the Economic and Social Commission of the African Economic Community in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, in November last year (1996). This Session of Council will be preparing for the convening of the inaugural session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Economic Community. It is my fervent hope that the Assembly will take important decisions as to the way forward for the building of the African Economic Community. In addition to being a means for our socio-economic development, the community will buttress the efforts of our Organization generally at peace and solidarity. Through it, Africa

will be able to articulate its collective position and strengthen its ability to defend its interests in a world in which those more cohesive and organized economic groupings stand a greater chance to emerge competitive.

While the building of the Community should constitute our main agenda to which we should devote our full resources and energies, we must, at the same time continue to address the issue of the much needed peace, security and stability in our Continent. Here again, we have provided ourselves with an instrument for peace through the establishment, within the OAU, of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This Mechanism has been in place for four years now. Despite its operational limitations, it has contributed to placing our Continent and its Organization at the centre of efforts aimed at seeking peaceful solutions to conflicts in the Continent. We may not always have been successful in our efforts to resolve conflict situations, but our Organization has not been indifferent to the suffering and tragedies affecting our peoples and has always tried to assist in defusing crisis situations.

We have endeavoured to promote and build a partnership for peace, bringing together the OAU, regional countries, the United Nations and the international community at large. Whenever the OAU was not directly involved, it provided its strong support and backing to the efforts deployed by either the countries of the region or the United Nations.

Indeed, we, at the OAU, have consistently taken the view that our Mechanism does offer the framework within which such a partnership for peace can be nurtured and promoted. In that context, we have worked towards ensuring complementarity and convergence of efforts in addressing conflict situations in our Continent. This was the approach which was taken, for instance, in the case of the crisis in the Great Lakes Region and which was clearly demonstrated through the appointment of a joint UN/OAU Special Representative in the person of Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun. We were relieved that, thanks to the sustained efforts deployed by African leaders, the UN/OAU Special Representative and our international partners and the position adopted by the parties concerned, the conflict in the former Zaire did not degenerate into the much feared bloodshed and division within the country. We encourage the new leadership of the Democratic Republic of Congo, to pursue the path of peace and national reconciliation, so that the country can play its rightful role in the comity of nations. It is also our hope, that the new leadership of that country will be able to contribute to the restoration of peace, security, stability and understanding in the Great Lakes Region.

It is equally our hope that the grave humanitarian challenge in the region will be addressed urgently with a view to finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the plight of the refugees and displaced persons. I wish to urge the international community to respond

with increased assistance to the refugees and displaced persons as well as to the countries of asylum to enable them cope with the burden of hosting the refugees.

I am also encouraged by the recent positive developments in Burundi, where the prospects for a peaceful and negotiated settlement seem to be gaining momentum. I wish to appeal to the parties in that country to make use of the opportunity for peace, provided by the regional initiative. In Somalia, we are, at last, beginning to see some positive signs as sustained efforts are deployed to promote dialogue between the various factions. We have welcomed the Soderre Agreement reached by 26 Somali factions. The peace process needs, however, to be expanded to involve the other Groups, so as to lay the foundations for lasting peace and national reconciliation in that country.

In Liberia, there is hope and great expectations that peace is at hand. It is my confident hope that the forthcoming elections scheduled for July 19, 1997 will provide the people of Liberia with an opportunity to turn their back on the past of violence, hatred and division and forge ahead with the building of a united and peaceful nation. I am also encouraged by the appointment of the Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Western Sahara in the person of Mr. James Baker, the distinguished former Secretary of State of the United States. I hope that the

peace process will now be reinvigorated so that a lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict can be found. Mr. Baker's efforts deserve our full support.

These signs of hope in the various areas of conflict on the Continent, have come to reinforce the remarkable success achieved by the people of Angola, following the historic inauguration of the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation. We congratulate the people and leadership of Angola, particularly, President Dos Santos and his Government, as well as Dr. Savimbi, the leader of UNITA for their commitment to peace and for the sustained efforts they have made in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol. Clearly, this has not been an easy task in view of the serious obstacles which had to be overcome. With this achievement, we now look forward to a new and reconciled Angola as a force for peace and development within the region and in the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was against the background of these encouraging developments in the Continent, that we were appalled by the news of the recent coup d'etat in Sierra Leone. This was a serious setback not only to Sierra Leone and its people who were just emerging from a devastating civil

war and had just embarked on a new path of democracy; but it was a blow to Africa as a whole. This coup was unequivocally condemned by the OAU which called on the countries of the Region to pursue efforts aimed at assisting the people of Sierra Leone restore constitutional order in their country. This unconstitutional action is unacceptable in this day and age, especially at a time when our Continent is committed to nurturing and promoting democracy and the rule of law within our societies. The OAU, which over the last few years, has been closely associated with efforts at democratization within our Member States, cannot be indifferent to the perpetration of a coup d'etat against a democratically elected government. No differences, political or otherwise, can justify recourse to the illegal use of force to take over power.

The recent experience in Sierra Leone, brings to the fore the whole issue of democracy and the respect of human rights on our Continent. The centrality of these issues was duly recognized by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in their 1990 Declaration on the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Africa's Response. Since that landmark Declaration, the democratization process of our societies and the promotion and protection of Human Rights have gained momentum in the Continent. African States are increasingly more responsive to this basic human requirement. At the same time, African civil society is also organizing itself to play its rightful role in promoting

democracy and human rights. This is another area where we need to build a solid partnership involving our Member States, the OAU and the civil society in our Continent, with a view to realizing the commitment entered into by our leaders in their 1990 Declaration. In this regard, I consider it of the utmost importance, that we build and strengthen institutions that will sustain democracy in our countries. Indeed, democracy cannot be decreed. It is a long term process which requires the nurturing of a culture of tolerance and democracy to be underpinned and protected by national institutions.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the Agenda we have set for ourselves. It is encouraging to note that in this endeavour, we enjoy a great support both within Africa and outside the Continent. I wish, in particular, to underline the substantial support we continue to receive from our partners in underwriting the operational activities under the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. We are conscious of the fact that this tremendous support also places a heavy responsibility on us. We are also aware that this support is neither indefinite nor unlimited. We know that our Organization will ultimately be judged on its ability to deliver on its objectives and its new Agenda. In this regard, we also know that the main

challenge facing our Organization is the enhancement of its capacity to perform. Already, we have started with a forward looking programme of capacity building. We realize, however, that if the Organization is to perform and meet the challenges of the next millennium, it will need a reorganized and restructured Secretariat. It is time, therefore, to engage our Organization in a programme of reform and renewal to reshape and re-dynamize it to meet the challenges of the future.

As we commemorate the Thirty-fourth Anniversary of the Organization, our commitment to reform and renewal is the best way to remain faithful to the ideals that inspired the Founding Fathers of the Organization of African Unity, who wanted to provide the Continent with an effective and efficient instrument for the promotion of African unity and solidarity and one which would serve the interests of our people.

On this auspicious occasion, let us therefore re-dedicate ourselves to the principles and ideals of our Organization and recommit ourselves anew to working together towards making it more relevant to demands, aspirations and expectations of our peoples and our Member States. Let us draw inspiration from the vision of the Founding Fathers and the legacy of unity which they bequeathed to us.

I thank you.