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THE OAU AND THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE IN AFRICA

SPEECH BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM

SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU

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Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great privilege for me to address such a distinguished gathering of eminent statesmen, scholars, business people, senior government officials and journalists in this particular Auditorium which holds so much history not just for the United Kingdom, but the world at large.

Chatham House as we all know, has been the premier think-tank for the promotion of relations between the United Kingdom and the world. It is therefore hardly surprising that with the ever increasing interests and important role of the United Kingdom in world affairs, Chatham House has come to be identified with great statesmen, scholars and diplomats around the world, whose ideas and actions have had great impact on our contemporary world and humanity in general.

I therefore consider my presence in your midst today and in this house of history which has just celebrated its 75th anniversary, as an honour for me personally, to share with you my thoughts on the subject of peace in Africa and what modest efforts the OAU has deployed to ensure that succeeding generations of Africans are spared the traumatic experiences of conflict and war.

Two significant events have taken place here in London which make this visit very timely and relevant. The first was the Symposium which was convened here at Chatham House in March this year on Britain's role in the world. That Symposium brought together leading statesmen from Britain, the Americas and, of course, from our own continent Africa. Essentially, that brainstorming exercise which took place here, was meant to underscore the continued relevance of the United Kingdom in world affairs. I was particularly delighted and encouraged to note that at a time when some leading countries in the international community are becoming more inward-looking and searching for escape routes from the long-standing universal concept of burden-sharing in dealing with the world's problems, this country and its leadership remain engaged and committed to the cause of our common humanity, especially the plight of the less fortunate ones around the world.

Secondly, I am particularly happy that this visit is taking place in the immediate aftermath of the celebrations marking the Fiftieth Anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe.

The sheer diversity of the veterans' backgrounds, all of them heroes and heroines in their own rights, from Europe - East and west, the Americas, Africa and Asia, who came together in a shared determination and commitment to a common cause, symbolised what is possible when all the peoples of the world are joined together in a just cause. Indeed, the history of the Second World War and VE Day in particular, has demonstrated that in spite of ideologies, beliefs, race and geo-political considerations, countries of the world can come together in one great endeavour to confront common

problems and challenges as well as co-exist peacefully and develop within an atmosphere of stability as was evidenced in the period immediately after the war.

For many of us from the continent of Africa, VE Day evokes memories of the commitment, modest contributions and often, ultimate sacrifices made by African fighters and servicemen to the preservation of Europe for democracy and the flourishing of freedoms, which has so far saved succeeding generations in countries like the United Kingdom from the scourge of war. In a sense therefore, Africa has always been part of the global village, even if the continent was caught up in a swirl of events which brought about profound changes within its nation states, continentally and internationally. As is now very well known, the demise of the cold war brought in its wake seemingly contradictory trends that reflected the tension between the desire to consolidate newly won independence together with the imperative need for integration on the one hand, and the reality of a misplaced drive towards fragmentation on the other hand.

The truth of the matter is that the breakdown of the ideological mindset and structures of the cold war global alliances, had unfortunately unleashed hitherto suppressed ethnic and political tensions as well as a process of disintegration of some African nation states into conflicting ethnic, cultural or religious units.

While it may be true that the conflicts which we are witnessing today have come as a result of the reaction of the people to the nature of political control in many African states in the past, the inequitable and undemocratic systems of governance, the gross violations of human rights and fundamental liberties and sometimes the denial of basic survival needs, it is also true that in the serious crises that now bedevil Africa, a symbiotic relationship exists between under-development and internal conflicts, making it imperative that the ultimate solution to the crisis, must be sought in rapid political, economic and social development and modernization.

For us at the OAU therefore, 1990 marked a decisive turning point in the history of Africa. It was in that year, that I presented to the Twenty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the OAU Heads of State and Government, a Report on the fundamental changes taking place in the world and their implications for Africa. That Report and the qualitative debate it provoked among African leaders on the precarious socio-economic situation on the continent, brought about a recognition that in order to bring about the process of socio-economic transformation and integration, a conscious effort must be made by our governments to promote popular participation in government and development, guarantee human rights and the observance of the rule of law as well as ensuring high standards of probity and accountability by public office holders.

In recommitting themselves to the further democratization of their societies and the consolidation of democratic institutions in

Africa, the continent's leaders who adopted the landmark "Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World", had made an important breakthrough for the OAU, because that Declaration ushered in a more dynamic approach to concepts of sovereignty and the principle of non-interference.

In practical terms, the overriding objective of the Declaration was to bring a new political approach and institutional dynamism into the ways Africa dealt with conflicts. In short, the Declaration sought to put Africa at the centre of attempts to deal with conflicts, by emphasising that the continent bears primary responsibility for resolving conflicts, even if it is to expect international solidarity and assistance.

In seeking to constructively address the new and more difficult challenges posed by internal conflicts, Africans had to come to terms with the objective reality that such conflicts were the external manifestations of prevailing contradictions in the national, socio-political and economic systems. Consequently therefore, by 1990, the leaders of Africa stood in one accord to affirm for the first time, collectively, that the road to peace, security and stability, which are the pre-conditions to development and nation-building, must commence from a conscious attempt to redress the grievances that drive people to violence as a tool of self-liberation from oppression, indignity and hunger.

Such a turning point was not arrived at lightly. I have already alluded to the striking feature of the post-cold war era

which presented us with a paradoxical proliferation of internal conflicts, made Africa the Region worst hit by humanitarian tragedies, and left quite a few of our countries in the Intensive Care Unit of the international humanitarian agencies and the donor community.

I am sure this very enlightened audience is more than familiar with the recent genocidal carnage in Rwanda which the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Carey, quite appropriately described as a holocaust, during his recent reconciliation mission to that country. Surely, you are all too familiar with the tragedies in Somalia and Liberia which had led some scholars to propagate the so-called "failed states concept". I need not add the civil wars that have been raging in Angola, the Sudan, Sierra Leone and until recently, Mozambique, as well as the crisis in Burundi. Clearly, in all of these conflicts, we have witnessed the unfortunate devastations and exacerbation of an unprecedented loss of innocent lives, especially women and children, massive displacement of people, which at the last count, was something in the region of 16 million. A sad, worisome and woefully neglected feature of the internal displacement of peoples, had always been the unusually large numbers of widows and orphans among the displaced, ecological degradation brought about by the large movement of people and resettlement, especially on fragile lands, which further threatens an already precarious ecological balance, thereby intensifying the competition over resources.

Africa, as I speak to you now, has the infamous role of generating 6 of the almost 18 million refugees worldwide.

Complimentary to this state of affairs had been the squandering of human and economic resources, particularly in cases where militarization had resulted in the diversion of valuable and scarce resources for war purposes, thereby relegating economic development into the background. In this environment, fundamental human rights, democratic freedoms and economic as well as social developments became gravely compromised, as civil order in some of our countries started breaking down.

It is also important to draw attention to the fact that although most of the conflicts are designated internal, they almost inevitably over-spill into the neighbouring countries, with the influx of refugees and political dissidents, thereby causing widespread insecurity and instability noticeable in almost all the Regions of the continent. Increasingly, we have become hard put to explain to upcoming generations why Africa, the continent with the richest of resources is made up of the world's poorest people. In deciding therefore to begin addressing the question of peace and stability, as well as the economic well-being and prosperity of Africa, the leaders of Africa were saying that the time had come to lay enduring foundations for the empowerment of Africans to assume responsibility for harnessing the great human and material potentials that our continent has been so richly endowed with.

It was against this background that between 1991 and 1992, I initiated the extensive consultations between the General Secretariat of the OAU and our Member States, in order to clearly define the essential elements, that would give the 1990 Declaration, an operational context. Those consultations primarily

focused on the need to establish within the OAU, a permanent Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa. At the end of that exhaustive but necessary process, the Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity, meeting in their Twenty-Ninth Ordinary Session in Cairo, Egypt from 28-30 June, 1993, adopted the Declaration on the establishment, within the OAU, of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

Essentially, the mechanism is built around a decision-making body known as the Central Organ with three levels of authority- The Ambassadorial and Ministerial levels as well as the level of Heads of State and Government. The operational arm of the mechanism on the other hand revolves around the General Secretariat especially through the office of the Secretary-General and the Division of Conflict Management. At the same time, conscious of the importance of resources in the operationalization of the mechanism, the Heads of State have also set up an OAU Peace Fund for which contributions from Africa and outside the continent are welcome.

The decision to establish the conflict management mechanism was informed by among other things, the mounting expectations of our people and also of the international community, to see a greater involvement by Africa in the search for durable solutions to the many problems that beset the continent. Indeed, that rise in expectations came at a time when many changes were taking place in the transitional nature of the international political environment. The cold war, which used to motivate the superpowers and made them respond to African conflicts in globalist terms had

come to a dramatic end. The behaviour of the international community towards conflicts in Africa also began to undergo profound changes, with a sharp decline in the possibility of external intervention or limitations in the staying power of outsiders.

The reluctance on the part of Africa's partners to shoulder new responsibilities, particularly in areas relating to Africa's collective security, peace and stability, had grave consequences for the continent's future development and security. Whereas on the one hand, many of our countries remain constrained by the lack of resources, we became faced with the daunting task of managing and resolving the many conflicts that had been ranging in many parts of our continent.

In reconciling ourselves to the reality of our situation in Africa, our leaders had determined that Africa will only be credible in the eyes of the international community when it is seen to be taking the lead in resolving African problems. They therefore underscored the rationale for a new approach to ending conflicts on the continent - an approach which would essentially move beyond military responses. It was thus, that the Mechanism envisaged the utilization of a wide range of preventive action and non-military means of resolving conflicts, including the promotion of confidence-building measures, delimiting humanitarian norms and codes of conduct, establishing trust through cooperation on shared development problems and identifying specific mechanisms for sustaining peace initiatives, as well as the fortification of the bonds between peace, democracy and development.

Having accepted the idea of preventive diplomacy by establishing the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the OAU had in the past one year, attempted to operationalise the concept within the framework of potential or incipient conflicts and on-going conflicts, which action includes: the establishment of supportive structures, outlining guidelines, activating national and sub-regional institutions for preventive diplomacy and creating positive and cooperative attitude among all the actors to the conflicts.

Cognizant of the crucial role that an Early Warning Network matched by an Early Political Action can play in conflict prevention, management and resolution, the OAU is in the process of establishing such a Network, based on a coordinating facility to be located in the envisaged Conflict Management Centre, which will be equipped with a Crisis Management Room now under construction at the Headquarters of the OAU.

Our Early Warning Network would take care of the need for timely information on potential conflict situations. It is envisaged that such a Network would have our Member States as they key focal points, including, of course, Sub-Regional Organizations, the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, Academic Institutions, Research Centres, the Media and NGOs. It is my expectation that the information which would be sourced from such a Network, would be appropriately analysed, so that accurate information, data and recommendations, could be made to ensure

early political action at the level of the Secretariat or by the Central Organ of the Conflict Management Mechanism.

At this point, let me state that our preference for preventive diplomatic action is a well thought out position. Firstly, it arises from the common-sensical notion that prevention is always better than cure, but more importantly, it reflects the serious constraints that we at the OAU operate under. I am sure I will not be telling you anything that you do not already know, when I refer to the serious funds constraints which continue to hamper our activities at the OAU. Many of our Member States are experiencing severe economic difficulties and even though they continue to extend commendable support to the Organization's efforts to deal with conflicts, the fact remains that in the face of competing demands, the allocation of scarce resources remain a most complicated and daunting exercise.

Let me now devote a few moments to what we at the OAU have been doing to ensure the maintenance of peace and stability in the continent.

In Burundi, faced with the obvious reluctance by the international community to be directly involved in that country, the OAU has for over one year now, deployed a multi-disciplinary Team of military and civilian personnel which is working with the people of Burundi to facilitate the process of dialogue, peace and national reconciliation. We undertook this course of action because the evolution of the Burundi crisis presented Africa with its greatest challenge. Indeed, after the tragic events in Rwanda

in 1994 which was a collective indictment on all Africans, the challenge to the OAU in Burundi was, how to effectively help, not only to defuse the tension there, but working in tandem with the international community, to prevent a repetition of the sordid events that we witnessed in Rwanda. I am glad to state that even though we are still very concerned at the situation in Burundi, there are signs that moderate political forces, including the country's President and Prime Minister have started working together and will ultimately triumph over the extremists.

The OAU therefore remains committed to supporting the government of Burundi and working with that country's leadership to bring about a peaceful solution of the crisis. We urge the international community to join us in taking a firm stand against the concept and culture of impunity, as well as the forces of extremism which seek to further polarize and destabilize the Burundi society.

In Rwanda, I believe most of you would be familiar with the role which the OAU played since the inception of the crisis in that country. Apart from deploying Neutral Military Observers in the early stages of the conflict which succeeded in stabilising the situation for a period of time, the OAU working together with countries of the region, supported and facilitated the long negotiations that resulted in the Arusha Peace Accord, some of which elements form the basis of the present dispensation in that country.

However, in the aftermath of the genocide which the international community could not prevent, the main focus of OAU's involvement revolves around the creation of conditions which are conducive to the process of national reconciliation based on justice. This I believe, would contribute most effectively to the process of healing the wounds left by the tragic and monstrous events of April to July 1994. Naturally we were also shocked and saddened over the recent tragic events at Kibeho. The people of Rwanda have seen enough bloodshed and carnage and therefore deserve peace. I was encouraged by the speed with which the government of Rwanda moved to establish an International Commission of Enquiry to ascertain the truth about what happened at Kibeho. Whatever is the outcome of the Enquiry, it is important that we move speedily to heal the festering wounds in that country.

What happened in Rwanda in 1994 was a great tragedy. The process of national reconciliation will be long but inevitable. We must continue to support and encourage the government of Rwanda to move along the path of national reconciliation. We must help them reactivate the judiciary system, but above all, we must ensure that all those who masterminded and executed those heinous crimes against our common humanity do not go unpunished. In calling for justice through the instrumentality of the long delayed International Tribunal, we are appealing to the international community to join us in sending a very strong message that in Africa, there should be no place for the concept of impunity now or in the future. In effect, we are saying that our continent has seen enough of senseless carnage and bloodshed.

This leads me to the phenomenon of refugees. We are alarmed at the increasing number of refugees and displaced persons on our continent, especially in the Great Lakes Region and in West Africa.

This situation continues to create problems of instability not just for the countries of origin, but also for the countries of asylum. I wish to renew my appeal to the international community to continue to provide the necessary support to the countries of asylum to lighten their burden in coping with the situation. Similarly, I wish to appeal for assistance to the countries of origin to facilitate the return and resettlement of these refugees.

In Somalia we had like the rest of the international community tried to prevent the internecine conflict that engulfed that African country. Right from the inception of the crisis, we moved speedily to sensitize the international community on the unfortunate developments that were unravelling there. This resulted in the intervention of the United Nations - an involvement we had hoped would facilitate a resolution of the conflict.

However, we all now know what happened in Somalia. In spite of the unfortunate turn of events in that country, we have welcomed the relative peace following the withdrawal of UNOSOM II and encouraged the leaders of that country to pursue the goal of peace and national reconciliation.

We shall remain engaged in facilitating efforts to bring about genuine national reconciliation by the Somali people themselves, particularly in the light of the decision taken by the recently concluded Summit Session of the Central Organ in Tunisia, which

mandated the current Chairman of the OAU, President Ben Ali of Tunisia, President Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and myself to follow through, support and nurture some of the new initiatives which are being put in place to ensure the attainment of peace in Somalia. In this connection, a tripartite delegation of the OAU will in the course of this month visit Somalia to hold discussions with the leaders of that country across the political spectrum and assess what more the OAU could do to help the people of Somalia.

In Liberia, it would interest you to know that the OAU had been consistent in its support of the efforts deployed by the West African States to bring about peace and stability there. Indeed, the OAU through the office of the Secretary General and subsequently, the Eminent Person for Liberia, Professor Canaan Banana, former President of Zimbabwe, played an important role in the negotiation process that culminated in the Cotonou Agreement.

The Organisation was also instrumental to securing the expansion of ECOMOG through the participation of troops from Tanzania and Uganda. However, I regret to have to state that despite the many efforts and sacrifices of the ECOWAS countries, as well as the most recent efforts deployed by the current Chairman of ECOWAS, President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana and the OAU Eminent Person for Liberia, Professor Canaan Banana, as well as the efforts of the United Nations, peace continues to elude that country.

In spite of such frustrations, we will continue to work with the countries of the West African Sub-Region to resolve the problem and also deal with the complicated situation in Sierra Leone, which

to all intents and purposes, seems to be a by-product of the conflict in Liberia. In this connection, we will continue to pursue all contacts with the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone to secure a negotiated settlement and the return of peace to that country. In this connection, we hope that the Revolutionary United Front will accept the offer of negotiations made by the government of Sierra Leone.

On Angola, I am encouraged by the outcome of the recent meeting between President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and Mr. Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA. Undoubtedly, that meeting and the decision of the two leaders to commit themselves to the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol signed by their Representatives on 20 November, 1994 augurs well for peace in Angola. It is my sincere hope that the two sides will continue to scrupulously honour their commitments to the Agreement and the United Nations would expedite action on the deployment of UNAVEM III, to assist the people of Angola restore peace and achieve national reconciliation.

Appart from these well-known conflict situations, the OAU has been active in less publicized preventive diplomatic actions to deffuse potentially explosive situations in different parts of Africa. Increasingly, as more and more of our member states revert to their continental organization for assistance to facilitate the process of dialogue, we have tried to justify this new confidence in the OAU. In the Congo and Gabon, at the invitation of the respective governments, we were able to work with both governments

and opposition in efforts to promote understanding and to avert instability and insecurity.

We continue to encourage our member states to persevere in the path of further democratization in the continent. At the invitation of our member states, we have monitored elections in over 22 African countries in the past three years alone which is unprecedented in the history of the OAU. Similarly, we have sought to take up problems associated with human rights abuses in the continent.

I cannot conclude without making reference to the decision by some of Africa's external friends and partners to launch several initiatives, aimed at identifying ways in which the international community, both collectively and bilaterally, could best support Africans in coping with the challenges of conflict management and resolution. The best known of these proposals are, of course, the British and French initiatives.

I am happy to note the convergence of views contained in these initiatives with my initial recommendations to the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Governments for the establishment of the conflict management mechanism. In that proposal, I called for the setting up of ready contingents within the military establishment of OAU member states, which contingents would be available to the Organisation and the United Nations, for peace keeping activities in the continent whenever the need arose.

Currently, our Member States are studying these and other proposals with a view to situating them within the context of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Management. In the interim, we welcome these genuine and well-meaning developments even as we continue to look up to the United Nations to assume its universal mandate for peace-keeping.

We at the OAU consider actions such as these initiatives, to be a welcome relief from the misleading notion of Afro-pessimism in which some have sought to portray Africa as a continent doomed to live on the edge, with population explosions, sliding economies and declining environments, as well as the terrible human, economic and political drain occasioned by civil wars and ethnic conflicts. Indeed the initiatives are also a welcome departure from the treatment and stereotyping of Africa as if the continent was a monolithic entity. As many in this distinguished gathering would know, there are many exciting and positive developments taking place right across the continent. In country after country, we are witnessing a great revival of the democratic spirit with internally driven and credible transitions from the past politics of exclusiveness, to open and democratic societies. In many parts of Africa, free and fair elections have been held and the balance of power is shifting from the old generation to a new generation of leaders. Indeed, despite setbacks here and there, the process of democratization in our continent is irreversible. The OAU remains a great catalyst for these changes.

Even though it may be true that Africans today may be poorer, less healthy, and have fewer prospects for better lives than they

had almost a decade ago, it is also true that in many parts of Africa today, civil wars are giving way to stability and democratic reforms with democratically elected leaders restructuring their economies to lay the groundwork for long-term growth. The possibility of growth is lurking, foreign investors are welcome in the continent and the potential for cooperation among our Member States is growing.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Africa is a continent in transition. The democratization process and the structural adjustment programmes undertaken by all African Countries, have produced mixed results in the short term. Eventhough change had sometimes produced undesirable results and complicated the political processes, the overwhelming majority of our governements are determined to push ahead with the emprovement of our peoples politically, economically and socially. I hope they can continue to count on the continued understanding and sympathy of the international community.

Indeed, these are all genuine and credible developments whose bona fides need to be acknowledged and encouraged by our external partners and friends. It is therefore my sincere and earnest hope that a more realistic, humane and constructive engagement between Africa and Europe, especially the United Kingdom, would bring about a mutually beneficial relationship as we prepare to transit into the 21st century. We, collectively, shoulder that responsibility to build a better world for future generations, so that our grand-

children and generations yet unborn would live under the sunshine of peace in Africa, in an increasingly interdependent world.

I thank you !

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