

ORGANIZATION OF
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ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
33rd ORDINARY SESSION
Harare, Zimbabwe
2 - 4 June, 1997

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

- **Your Excellency, Mr. Liamine Zeroual,
President of the People's Democratic Republic
of Algeria, Chairman of the Session,**
- **Your Excellency, Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe,
President of the Republic of Zimbabwe,**
- **Your Majesty,**
- **Your Excellencies the Heads of State and
Government and Heads of Delegation,**
- **Your Excellencies the First Ladies,**
- **Your Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan,
Secretary General of the United Nations,**
- **Your Excellency, Dr. Ahmed Esmat Abdul Majid,
Secretary General of the League of Arab States,**
- **Mr. K.Y. Amoako,
UN Under-Secretary General and
Executive Secretary of the ECA,**
- **Mr. Ferhat Lounes,
Vice President of ADB,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**We are pleased to be here in Harare to attend the 33rd
Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. I
wish to express my profound appreciation to President Robert Mugabe,**

the Government and people of Zimbabwe for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to us all. We are gratified that this session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government is being held in this vibrant region of our Continent at the invitation and under the auspices of President Mugabe of Zimbabwe.

We are, therefore, looking forward to a fruitful and successful Summit of our Organization. I wish to seize the opportunity to place on record my gratitude to H.E. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon and Outgoing Chairman of our Organization for the cooperation and support he extended to me personally and to the General Secretariat during his chairmanship. I thank him for the keen interest he has shown in the issues of concern to our Organization.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, Ghana celebrated the Fourtieth Anniversary of its independence. Together, with the people of Ghana, our Continent celebrated the liberation of the first African country, from colonial bondage. Africa fought against colonialism, and at great sacrifice managed to deliver itself to freedom. In coming to Zimbabwe forty years since the beginning of the inexorable march to freedom, Africa is now paying tribute to the gallant people of this great country and indeed the

entire region of Southern Africa, who refused to succumb to oppression and subjugation, rose up in arms and paid the supreme sacrifice to defeat colonialism and racism.

When the OAU last met in next door Lusaka in 1972, this was a different region. Portuguese colonialism was at rampage in Mozambique and Angola. The white settler regime of Ian Smith was devastating this country while apartheid was spreading hatred and death in South Africa and Namibia. Two and a half decades later, this is a very different region. Indeed, where before the political landscape was riven by discord, neighbours now live in peace and collective harmony. The region is free and has become a positive and dynamic force for the development of the Continent.

We take pride in a free Southern Africa which today stands as a testament to the unity of Africa. Through the Liberation Committee, Africa waged a struggle for freedom, liberty and justice. We triumphed because we were united and we were able to inspire the world to rally to our support through our unity. It is unity, tenacity, resilience, commitment and sacrifice which we celebrate today as the OAU Summit returns to Southern Africa.

In a couple of years, the world will celebrate a new millennium. Africa too will have cause to celebrate its freedom. But Africa will be doing so as the weakest link in the chain of global economic

partnership and as a Continent still reeling from the pains of war and grappling with political transformation. Africa will be entering the next century as a poor continent and one where its people are still faced with the challenge of change and adjustment. Africa will be celebrating in difficulty but as one; and notwithstanding our condition, we shall stand as a free and united Continent to claim our rightful place at the table of Nations.

If I speak of the difficult condition of Africa as it enters into the new millennium, it is not to give credence to the misplaced notion of our detractors who want to perpetuate an image of our Continent as a place of endemic poverty, violence and suffering. Rather, it is to put across the reality of our condition and to sound a clarion call to action to put things right. It is a call to foster peace, to promote unity and economic development. It is a call to expand the content and context of our political freedom so that democracy is nurtured, consolidated and allowed to blossom. It is a call to persist along the path of economic reform and integration in the Continent. It is a call to put an end to the sounds of war and give chance to the chants of peace and human solidarity.

In 1990 in Addis Ababa, this Assembly took a look at the then evolving situation in the world and saw the opportunities and challenges which it presented to our Continent. In your Declaration on Fundamental

Changes, you set yourselves a new agenda. It was an agenda for the healing and renewal of the Continent. You resolved to pursue peace with renewed determination. You also resolved to apply yourselves fully to the challenge of economic reform within our countries and to the integration of our Continent. You decided to put the full energies of the Continent to the promotion and consolidation of democracy, human rights and good governance. You saw the challenge before our countries as resting on this triad.

Since then, we have witnessed tremendous changes in the world and in Africa. Yes, we are still in difficulty but Africa is not resigned to its fate. It has taken bold steps to right what had gone wrong. Yes, some African countries are in difficulty, but the whole continent is not. The larger part of the Continent is at peace, committed to its unity and determined to see faster economic development.

Our countries are still experiencing serious economic difficulties but are staying the course of adjustment and restructuring because they believe - and rightly so - that there is no better option.

Today, initial results are generally encouraging as many countries have managed to stem the tide of economic decline and some have recorded modest growth. Overall, the prognosis is good even if underneath this tendency at growth, lies immense suffering of our people.

Our countries' ability to provide the basic social services such as education, health, safe drinking water, housing and even of developing their physical infrastructure continues to be constrained. Of course, the economic reforms including the liberalization of currency markets and trade and rationalization of government programmes and personnel, have all combined to generate a favourable environment for economic growth. Today, fiscal discipline and economic responsibility have set us on the trajectory of economic turn around.

What remains as our major challenge is to ensure that this journey to economic liberation which we have embarked on, is travelled by everyone and that no one in our societies is left behind. This is to say that the benefits of the new economic era should be made to spread broadly and that those who are vulnerable, are enabled sustenance through social arrangements by which they access those benefits.

As our countries struggle internally, we realize that ultimately they cannot make meaningful progress unless that struggle is tied-in with the external aspects of trade and international economic cooperation. Africa exists and relates with the rest of the world within a defined international context. It is a context in which competition is the philosophy and the strong determine the rules. Our challenge is to be able to compete in this international environment and be strong enough to take effective part in the setting of those rules. In both, our unity as an

economic entity is critical. This is why the agenda for economic integration in the Continent must be pursued vigorously for it is only if Africa is economically strong and united that it can compete effectively and participate meaningfully in the elaboration of the arrangements for international trade. Our strength lies in our unity and ability to harness our resources, reaching out to the talents, industry and creativity of our people.

We have started with the initial stages of coordinating the work of the regional economic groupings upon which the African Economic Community will rest. Today we are clearer on the kind of role that they will play by way of contributing to the continental efforts at economic integration. We need to and must ensure that the programmes of these groupings are synchronized with that of the African Economic Community and ultimately are made to converge into our common enterprise of the community. It is only when we can achieve economic coherence as a community, that we can take advantage of economies of scale in developing the vast potential of our Continent. Integration is not a favour that we are doing to one another, but a necessity. Our weapon is unity and joint action if Africa is to emerge as an important player on the international economic scene. Indeed, we see those in Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Pacific who are more powerful, resolutely committed to integration. We see those who are the economic power houses, ardent on unity. Why should we not draw lessons from them?

The ability of our countries to succeed together will depend on how they succeed individually. It is the sum total of their individual success that will dictate the pace and extent of this integration. Our countries have started on the road to economic reform and we have begun to see the results. At the same time, there is the parallel realization that economic success will also be determined by the level of social cohesiveness and unity. All these in turn rest on how much the citizens of our countries feel part of the political processes and national effort. This is why our countries have awakened to the challenge of further democratization. Today, most of our countries are multi-party democracies committed to the principles of equity, justice and popular participation. The adoption of a democratic, tolerant and just system of governance is no longer the exception. It has become the norm. Indeed, there is a well-established trend throughout the Continent towards the establishment of representative governments that are more inclusive and better attuned to the interests and aspirations of the people than ever before. The recent coup d'etat in Sierra Leone against a duly elected Government of President Tejan Kabbah is an unacceptable attempt to defy this trend. The OAU has unequivocally condemned this illegal usurpation of power which blatantly challenges the will of the people of Sierra Leone. In the interest of both Sierra Leone and Africa as a whole, everything must be done to restore constitutional legality in that country. Of course, as we proceed along the path of political reform, Africa has rightly insisted that the content of democratization will rest on the fundamental principles of

freedom and justice, taking into account our traditions, customs and unique circumstances, including those pertaining to the level of our socio-economic development. We can insist that we retain the right to determine what is the best for us without deviating from the pillars of democracy.

We at the OAU commend the leaders of Africa for the courage they have shown in taking bold measures to foster greater democratization and embracing reform. Contrary to what our detractors want to suggest, the political revolution which is consolidating in Africa is not an imposition from outside but a process born of our own internal requirements and sustained by our determination to nurture and consolidate it. We have seen in this process, an opportunity to assist in the development, expansion and consolidation of a political environment supportive of stability and economic development in our Continent. I wish to place on record our appreciation to the Member States for allowing us to assist, through the observation of elections in many of them.

We have also been honoured by the opportunity to take part in and assist with the promotion of human and peoples' rights through the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Furthermore, the whole world is watching Africa cooperate for justice and the promotion and respect for human rights. They have seen our dismay at the slaughter of innocents and our collective efforts to assist countries where the State institutions have collapsed or failed to ensure the respect of sanctity of life.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in South Africa, and before that, the experience of reconciliation in this country are models to be emulated in Africa and the world.

Our countries know well that the efforts at economic development, democratization and human rights will bear fruit only if they are exerted in circumstances of peace and stability. This is why over the last several years, we have sought to put in place, a sustainable peace agenda leveraged upon an active programme of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Our efforts have born fruit in many areas where we have been able to make timely intervention and through creative involvement, managed to forestall conflicts or help in their management. At the core of these efforts, are the rights of the individual, tolerance for the individual, and respect for the individual. Moreover, the world is no longer parochial in its outlook, and global interdependence and responsibility is becoming a reality across many fields of human endeavour. As we therefore work to re-establish peace in troubled areas and to protect the vulnerable and forgotten, key allies are found in the emergence of civil society groups, mass media and electronic communications. In many parts of the world when citizens protest against atrocities, they shout that "the whole world is watching" and indeed it is true. Sometimes, the world learns about our problems before we do!

The establishment of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution was a response to the many crises which continue to cry for solution. In the Great Lakes Region, despite the humanitarian difficulties that remain, we can draw encouragement from the fact that the drums of war have so recently fallen silent and that the new Democratic Republic of Congo whose President, Mr. Laurent Desire Kabila we welcome here in our midst, will hopefully emerge as a force for peace and development in the area. Yet, we must persevere and urge those at conflict to seize the opportunity for dialogue and accommodation which is offered to them by the instrumentality of the mechanism. The mechanism is our own instrument of political empowerment and self-liberation from the oppression and devastation of conflict and war. We need to use it, to strengthen it politically and materially. It is only when we demonstrate the requisite support to it, when we show faith in its efficacy, that we can strengthen it as an instrument which can oversee a sustainable peace agenda in our Continent. I wish to thank Member States and all those both from within and outside the Continent, who have assisted materially and enabled the mechanism to carry out its functions.

The OAU is our Organization. It is at the same time the embodiment of our collective will for unity and a vehicle for the advancement of our cause. It is under the Organization that we derive our collective identity as Africa. We are unique in having such an Organization. No other continent has such framework for consultation

and collective action. We all know what we have been able to do, in terms of promoting our unity and solidarity through the Organization. Earlier, I spoke of our victory over racism and colonialism. Recently, we saw how our unity and solidarity - made it possible to have an African, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali elected as Secretary General of the United Nations.

Even more recently, our unity and solidarity made it also possible for another African, our brother Kofi Annan to succeed Dr. Boutros-Ghali as Secretary General. I wish to pay tribute to Dr. Boutros-Ghali for serving Africa and humanity at large with commitment and distinction. We all are proud of his impeccable record at the United Nations and his relentless pursuit for the cause of humanity and the fulfillment of the goals and aspirations of the United Nations. We are equally proud that he has passed the mantle of leadership on to a distinguished son of Africa who has proved himself over the many years of his dedicated service to the world community. I am happy that our brother Kofi Annan is here with us. I welcome him most warmly and reiterate to him our full support in his mission on behalf of humanity.

The OAU Secretariat is made up of human beings - with all the abilities and failings of human beings. It may not always meet the expectations of Member States. But, if we falter at times, it is not because

we lack effort. We have tried and we shall continue to do so even harder. Our objective is to prove worthy of the trust and confidence reposed in us as the servants of Africa.

Of course the Secretariat needs reform in its operations and personnel so as to align them to its new missions. We at the Secretariat are committed to its restructuring and modernization as well as re-equipping it to face the challenges of the new millennium. In my report to the Assembly, I set out fairly in detail, my philosophy of reform and its context. It is my fervent hope that this programme of reform and renewal will enjoy the support of the Assembly.

The OAU is your Organization and its institutions are there to serve the Continent. It is there for Member States to use. It can only make meaning if it is used and used adequately by Member States. The OAU can make a difference if its members have undivided confidence in it and situate it at the centre of efforts at dealing with Africa's problems. It is such confidence which will strengthen the Organization and in turn inspire the outside world to take the Organization even more seriously.

Today, we see the difference because Member States have increasingly placed importance on the Organization. Their willingness to cooperate with the OAU, to allow it to play an enhanced role in the efforts at conflict resolution as well as to assist in the democratization process, has

strengthened the Organization as an instrument at the service of the Continent. It is no wonder that many from outside now seek our views and value our counsel.

Mr. Chairman,

In the course of the last eight years, I have understood my primary mission to be that of being a servant of the Continent and an advocate of its cause. I have strived to do so with all my ability and I take heart at the confidence, support and guidance, I continue to receive from the leadership of the Continent. I share the view of our leaders of an Africa destined for the future, one which does not shy away from its responsibilities and one which is prepared to acknowledge its shortcomings and draw the necessary lessons from them so that it can do better tomorrow. I share your vision of an Africa that refuses to be marginalized and one which seeks to play its rightful role in global affairs. I share your vision of a continent which is not resigned to charity but one which is determined to break out of the cycle of dependence and underdevelopment. I share your vision of a reborn continent, at peace with itself, and a haven of democracy. I see Africa's governments and peoples working together and becoming increasingly confident of intra-African linkages with every success. And as Africa becomes stronger and more cohesive from within, we will be able to command more attention outside our region, projecting our concerns and fostering our own ideas in the global arena. I see an

OAU respected by its Member States and the African people, as a dependable arm of their collective will; supported by its members politically and financially and encouraged to bring this diverse Continent together in political harmony, ready to seize the great opportunities awaiting our common resolve in the years ahead.

Many times I have spoken of the ambition for our Continent. It is an ambition for a better tomorrow in which our children will be allowed to live in peace, without the menace of war and of deprivation and able to play, like children - with toys and not guns, to go to decent schools, to be housed, fed and educated and to dream of an even better future for themselves. It is an ambition that is well within our ability to achieve. These years at the OAU have confirmed me in this view as I have been inspired by the tenacity and resilience of the people of this Continent. The vast potential of Africa and its diversity are more than adequate to supply the resources with which to pursue and realize our ambition. It is possible if we put our hearts into it, if we are determined, united and above all if we adopt the can-do-attitude and if we defeat self-doubt and proceed with confidence.

We have begun with the elaboration of an agenda to fulfil that ambition for a better tomorrow. Our struggle for peace through conflict resolution in the Continent, our pursuit of unity and economic integration is an agenda for that ambition.

We now have a perspective of the future we need and want for our Continent. We all agree that the Organization of African Unity is the vehicle that will oversee the implementation of that agenda towards the fulfillment of our ambition. What we now need is to recommit ourselves to that ambition, to strengthen our capability to achieve it. Africa has in the past triumphed as one and in unity. When a part of Africa falters, so does the entire continent. Today, we need that unity and solidarity. We need a sense of destiny to stand together as we move into the next Century. Here in Harare, I invite Your Excellencies and through you, the people of our Continent, to rise to the call for unity and solidarity, in pursuit of the ambition of our Continent for a better tomorrow.

I thank you.