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ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
Twenty-Eighth Ordinary Session
29 June - 1st July 1992
Dakar, Senegal

INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL,
H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
30 JUNE 1992

Your Excellency President Abdou Diouf
Current Chairman of the Organization,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government
and Heads of Delegation,
Distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, at the very outset, to join our distinguished host, President Abdou Diouf of Senegal, in welcoming you to Dakar and to wish you successful deliberations. I would also wish to place on record my most profound gratitude to the outgoing Chairman, President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida of Nigeria, for the very able and dynamic leadership he provided the Organization during the past year. In particular, I want to thank him for the unflinching support he extended to the General Secretariat and for the ready encouragement, counsel and guidance he put at my disposal as well as the personal support he extended to me. His indefatigable involvement in the search for solutions to the many conflicts in the continent stands as eloquent testimony to his own personal commitment and that of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the cause of the continent. Once again, I wish to thank Your Excellency and the Government of Nigeria most sincerely. I equally want to express my appreciation for the cooperation extended by all the Members of the outgoing Bureau.

Mr Chairman,

I take heart at the fact that the Chairmanship of our Organization passes on to another indefatigable fighter for the cause of freedom and justice and for the dignity of Africa. President Abdou Diouf has spared no effort in applying himself to the cause of this continent. He has effectively carried on the tradition of Senegal as a frontline fighter for human freedom and justice. I and my colleagues in the General Secretariat look forward to working very closely with Your Excellency and with your

colleagues in the incoming Bureau.

Mr Chairman,

Only yesterday a terrible blow was struck in our hearts by learning of the assassination of the President of Algeria, H.E. Mohamed Boudiaf. He fell victim to the violence of intolerance against which he resolutely fought so that Algeria can prosper in peace and harmony. As we mourn his passing away, I wish to express the strong hope that the continent of Africa will rise against the forces of violence and intolerance, in order that we can live in peace. Africa, a continent rich in diversity of race, colour, religion and beliefs should learn from this yet another sad experience and more to strengthen a culture of tolerance drawing strength from the diversity of the continent. I wish, in this regard, to echo the sentiments expressed by Presidents Ibrahim Babangida and Abdou Diouf, yesterday, on behalf of the Assembly, in extending our most heartfelt condolences and solidarity to the Government and people of Algeria as well as to the bereaved family.

Mr Chairman,

I wish, on a happier note, to welcome President Yasser Arafat amongst us and to reiterate the unflinching support of the OAU for the struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable right of self-determination and independence.

Mr Chairman,

In the introduction to my report, which was circulated to the Council and made available to this Assembly, I dwelt at length with the many issues before the continent. I shall, therefore, in this instance, limit myself to a few remarks of a general nature. Your Assembly is convening at a very critical phase in the history of independent Africa. You meet when we are celebrating victory against the tyranny of colonialism and waging a final and decisive onslaught against institutionalized racism in South

Africa. With very few exceptions, our countries are, on the average, thirty years old. It has not been a smooth journey but we have made important achievements. Our leaders seized the challenge of independence and created nations and institutions of Government to run them. We have, against many odds, preserved our independence and managed to preserve continental unity. We have made important achievements in terms of social and human advancement, even if the development needs of our people still remain acute.

But whatever we have been able to achieve together in substantive terms - that is decolonization continental unity and forging a common identity - have been as a result of unity of purpose and of action. Today, that unity of purpose and action is all the more needed. The configuration of the world political situation has undergone fundamental transformation. Cold war has ended and Africa no longer has the geo-strategic interest to the great powers in a world devoid of cold war. The changes in former Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have brought new problems and opportunities. The exigencies of meeting the needs of Europe has now led to a competition for resources for humanitarian assistance and investments much to the detriment of Africa.

In sum, Africa has to establish a strategic importance for itself in the world. To create a strategic importance for itself so as to become a player in world politics, our continent must address itself to the many burning issues which now undermine the capability of the continent to assert itself. The imperatives of ending Apartheid, of ensuring further democratization and managing transition, ending endemic conflicts and of bringing economic development must now form the core of the new agenda for the continent. It is an agenda which requires the total mobilization of all our resources including the active involvement of the women and youth of Africa. It is an agenda to create an Africa of the future which we must will to the coming generations - A free, united, democratic and prosperous Africa.

Your Excellencies,

We have been encouraged by the progress which has been made in the process of bringing down the structures of Apartheid. Our hopes persist that the people of South Africa - of all races - will continue in their coalition for change so that ultimately, that country can emerge, in unity and democracy, and as an important addition to the African ranks. We are outraged by the recent massacre of innocent civilians at Baepatong and very concerned by the threat of Mr De Klerk to reimpose the state of emergency instead of taking firm measures to end violence and to create conditions conducive to the continuation of the negotiations. I still hope, nonetheless, that it will be possible to overcome the present difficulties and restore the negotiation process on course. In the meantime, the decisions of the Ad Hoc Committee on Southern taken in Arusha, last April, must continue to guide us in the handling of relations with the Government of South Africa.

Mr Chairman,

Apart from the foremost challenge of ending Apartheid, which is rooted in the belief in our own freedom, we must seek also to liberate ourselves from the oppression of the many problems facing the continent. One of the those problems which, in my view, requires urgent attention is that of conflicts, which are decimating our populations and aggravating our peoples' suffering and poverty. In both of my report to the Council of Ministers and the introduction to it, I spoke at length on the scourge of conflicts and their devastating consequences to our economies and societies. I spoke of the deprivation, suffering, hate and division which these conflicts have engendered in our societies. I spoke of innocent men, women, and children who are uprooted and thrown into the misery, insecurity and uncertainty of exile as refugees. I spoke of the young children who are maimed, mutilated and orphaned; whose tender lives are violently ended by conflicts. I spoke of how inexcusable, it is in all conscience, for anyone to remain insensitive or indifferent to so much suffering and death, to so much destruction in our continent. Above all, I spoke of the serious handicap which conflicts

present in our efforts at development and the need for Africa to set up a procedure or mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of the conflicts.

I wish to inform this august Assembly that the Council had an intensive, wide, ranging and profound exchange of views on the question of conflicts as well as on my proposal for a mechanism which was placed before it. While the recommendation arising from this rich and very useful exchange of views, on the matter, is before this Assembly, I wish, nonetheless, to note that I found overwhelming acceptance of Member States on the imperative ^{NEED} for Africa to address itself seriously on the issue of conflicts. There was also general consensus in support of the principle of establishing a mechanism within the OAU. Various views exist on some institutional and operational details of such a Mechanism and the recommendation of the Council on the matter is a product of the rich diversity of view which was prevalent in the discussions.

Mr Chairman,

The proposals on the conflict resolution, which I made to the Council, underly my own deep faith in the ability of our organization to make a difference to the people of Africa. I know Africa possesses the resources and the will to triumph. It has the ability to reach deep into its innerself, to summon its genius and industry and apply them to the resolution of its problems. I believe Africa can and must be able to resolve its own conflicts and not yield that right to outsiders. No other region in the world has yielded this right to foreigners outside the context of collective action within the United Nations. We should preserve our dignity and our pride. We, in Africa, have the advantage of having the OAU. We should use it creatively and more effectively and we should strive even harder to reseize the initiative in determining the destiny of the continent.

There are new realities in the continent. The world is changing and Africa has to and wants change. The disposition is there. What we need is to provide leadership, to chart out the proper strategies and sensitize the people to the objectives we seek to achieve. We need courage and vision in order to move into new areas. There may still be hesitancy to venture into new spheres for the fear of the unknown. This is quite understandable. Yet, it is most encouraging to take cognisance of the fact that a disposition to start the process is clearly evident.

Mr Chairman,

Africa is still going through economic problems of immense magnitude. Our countries are still victims of an unfavourable international economic environment with its attendant repercussions of the excruciating debt burden, negative resource flows, endemic poverty and under-development generally. Yes, economic needs are still very acute indeed. Yet, our countries have made great efforts and their labour has begun to show the first sign of bearing fruit. Bold and creative economic policies have halted economic decline and restored modest growth to the continent. In the political sphere, our countries have taken the task of further democratization seriously. We see the continent blossoming with new life and political activity. Our Governments, more and more, are responding to the challenge of giving this new life and political activity, a context in which it can be expressed and articulated. Diversity of view is now becoming a positive force, underlying the whole dynamic of development of our continent. In short, we are seeing a revival in the continent - of a new awareness on the part of people and our Governments and a common desire to enter into constructive partnership for development.

Mr Chairman,

As Governments and people of Africa are forging this partnership for change, the OAU has found itself fortunate enough to be associated in this process. The demands

on the Organization are increasing along with confidence in it. We have been invited to observe elections in several countries. The great expectations from this Organization underly the deep faith which the people of this continent have in it. The people of Africa believe - and rightly so - that this Organization, being the embodiment of their collective will, can and must play the determinant role in deciding the fate and future of the continent. The people of Africa have great ambition for the Organization : they want it to achieve. Likewise we, in the General Secretariat, have and must have ambition for the continent. We believe our people have the capacity, the ability and the determination to persevere and to achieve. Our ambition is to see that that ability and determination finds complement in our activities. Our ambition is to see that Africa and its people triumph in freedom, Unity, prosperity and in dignity.

Mr Chairman,

We have a right to envisage and look forward to an Africa more peaceful, united and prosperous. Africa has the capacity, the resources and now the disposition to achieve this objective. Our people have the will to triumph. Africa is in a new era, Great opportunities are presenting themselves and new vistas for cooperation among our countries and people are opening up. There is, in a very real sense, a movement in the continent. We can feel it, we can see it. The leadership of our continent, at all levels, need to redouble efforts so as to inject the kind of political will which will nurture and sustain the momentum of this movement. The movement will have to be sustained by a keen sense of mission, of selflessness and by a pioneering spirit. It will require the same zeal and passion for a future of this continent, in freedom, unity and prosperity, which guided the founding Fathers of this Organization. I wish, in this respect, to pay great respect and a deserving tribute to H.E. President Houphouet Boigny whose presence with us has added a special meaning to this august Assembly.

Mr Chairman,

I have, in the last few years, been very much encouraged by this movement. Africa is clearly being noticed, in the world, not exclusively as a continent prone to conflict and condemned to eternal poverty and backwardness and one whose people have succumbed to total despair. We are beginning to be noticed also as a continent which can inspire hope and one which can take itself seriously. The movement for further democratization, the new realism which has been brought into the management of our economies, genuine and sustained efforts at conflict resolution, are engendering new hope in the continent. Our Governments and people are rising to this challenge of collective leadership. Even the cynics, in the continent and abroad, are taking note of the emerging continent. In a very real sense, Africa is on the right path and Afro-pessimism is in the retreat. We should now put Afro-optimism on a higher offensive.

Mr Chairman,

When our Leaders met to found this Organization, in 1963, it was in the context of a different world. They set themselves out to achieve what were deemed the priorities of the time. Remnants of colonialism and racialism were an anachronism in a continent which was emerging into freedom. The mandate of decolonization was rightly given to the OAU and Member States dedicated themselves fully to this mission and devoted immense resources. Our Organization aligned its policies and structures to this objective. Today, almost thirty years later, we are proud of the results of that determination of the continent to fight for freedom. Our numbers have risen from thirty-two, in 1963, to fifty-one Members of this Organization, today, and apart from the unfinished business of ending Apartheid, in South Africa, we have accomplished the mission of bringing political independence to the continent.

The OAU now faces new challenges. Political independence must be underwritten by economic prosperity and democracy to consolidate and survive. We now, therefore, need an OAU which can work to erect the new structures to hold our independence together. It is now a new world and in a sense, therefore, we need a new new OAU - one which is more relevant and equipped to meet the challenges of this new different and complex world in which Africa has to operate.

Your Excellencies,

The agenda before this Assembly is a clear reflection of the challenges before Africa. It comprises issues which constitute the new agenda for our Organization. We can not effectively deal with the problems of economic cooperation and integration, AIDS pandemic, refugees, natural disasters, such as the drought of unprecedented magnitude now ravaging Southern Africa or deal with issues of Human Rights, the Environment, poverty and development, without a new determination, as a continent to work together. These are shared problems, they must be solved jointly. This Assembly must provide an opportunity to think together on how we can do so. This Dakar Summit, under the able and dynamic Chairmanship of President Abdou Diouf, should be able to take the required decisions and live up to the expectations of the people of our continent.

I thank you.