



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY THE OAU SECRETARY GENERAL
H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM TO THE TWENTY-
FIRST SUMMIT MEETING OF HEADS OF STATE AND
GOVERNMENT OF ECOWAS – ABUJA, NIGERIA
30th OCTOBER 1998**

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- **Your Excellency, General Abdulsalaami Abubakar,
Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the
Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and
Current Chairman of the Economic Community
of West African States.**

- **Your Excellencies, the Heads of State and Government
and Heads of Delegation.**

- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am, once again, honoured and privileged to attend and address the ECOWAS Summit. I wish, at the outset, to express to the ECOWAS Leaders, gathered here, our fraternal salutations and convey to you all a message of solidarity on behalf of our continental Organization.

I am pleased to attend this Summit which is the first being held under the chairmanship and leadership of General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the Head of State of Nigeria. Indeed, the holding of this Summit meeting of ECOWAS, here in Abuja at this crucial juncture of the history of Nigeria, is particularly significant. The OAU's presence here today should also be seen as a mark of support and encouragement of our Continent to the bold endeavours being undertaken by General Abubakar to restore Nigeria and its people to their rightful place in the international community. We, at the OAU, have been following very closely

developments in this important founding Member State of our Organization. We have shared with the Nigerian people their moments of difficulties and their moments of joy. We highly value the commitment of Nigeria and the Nigerian people to the cause of Africa and Africans and their immense contribution towards defending the interests of our Continent. The crucial role being played by Nigeria in promoting peace, security, stability and development in West Africa and in other parts of our Continent is highly regarded within and outside Africa.

I personally have always held the view that the strength and unity of Nigeria is the strength and unity of Africa. That is why, we are all encouraged to see Nigeria strengthening its cohesion and unity and creating conditions and an enabling environment for the full harnessing of the energies of its vibrant people. Thanks to the decisions and actions taken by the Abubakar Administration towards a democratic dispensation.

- **Mr. Chairman,**
- **Your Excellencies, Heads of State
and Government and Heads of Delegation,**

You are meeting here today to deliberate on important matters concerning peace, security and stability in the region and to address issues of cooperation, integration and development within ECOWAS. These two aspects of your agenda are very familiar to us at the OAU. Indeed, over the years, we have been working closely with ECOWAS in forging peace, security and stability in our Continent and its regions and in promoting economic cooperation and integration at regional and continental levels. Through this collaboration, we have been able to make significant steps towards building a strong partnership for peace as called upon by the OAU Heads of State and Government in their declaration establishing the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Throughout the years, the OAU has been supportive of the efforts of ECOWAS towards the restoration of peace in the region, particularly in

addressing the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The OAU has been closely involved in all initiatives undertaken by ECOWAS in striving to seek peaceful solutions to these conflicts.

As we meet here today, let me make use of this occasion to impress upon all concerned that the peace we have all collectively contributed to achieve in Liberia shall be consolidated. We should guard against any and all actions which could undermine peace, security, stability and progress in that country. Let Liberia be an example of African success.

Similarly, In Sierra Leone, we exhort all parties involved to ensure that the principled efforts we have all made – OAU, ECOWAS and the United Nations – to restore the democratically elected Government of President Kabbah are vindicated and sustained through a coordinated and substantial programme of assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone. I also urge that we give the Government of Sierra Leone all the support and encouragement it deserves in conducting a process of national reconciliation so that the country can finally settle down to a durable peace, free from war and destruction.

Mr. Chairman,

The situation in Guinea Bissau remains of extreme concern to us, not in the least because of its implications for peace and security in the sub-region and particularly because of the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in its wake. While commending the leaders of the Region, the CPLP and others who have worked tirelessly to bring peace to that country, the OAU strongly urges the parties to pursue a negotiated solution to the current conflict. We remain ready to work closely with all concerned so that an acceptable framework for lasting peace could be established.

It is in the spirit of partnership, solidarity and a sense of a common fate and destiny that the OAU has encouraged ECOWAS efforts towards establishing a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and

Resolution. The OAU stands prepared to further assist ECOWAS in every way possible in this important endeavour. Not only do we believe that the establishment of such a mechanism will enhance the capacity of the sub-region in tackling the potential and actual conflicts, but it will also complement the efforts of the OAU as a continental body. In this endeavour, we should be inspired and draw lessons from the outstanding experience of ECOMOG. And, I wish here, to pay deserving tribute to ECOMOG for its invaluable contribution to the restoration of peace in Liberia and constitutional order in Sierra Leone. This African endeavour will be remembered as one of the most decisive peace initiatives in our Continent.

While still on this issue, I wish once again to draw your attention to the urgent need to address the issue of small arms proliferation and its negative impact on the peace and security of the sub-region as well as the rest of the Continent. I am aware of the efforts deployed in this direction by President Alpha Omar Konare of Mali and others. I look forward to the consolidation of this and other initiatives, so that the problem of small arms proliferation can be adequately addressed.

The focus of ECOWAS on the issues of peace and security in the sub-region is indeed necessary for creating the appropriate environment for economic development and the socio-economic betterment of the peoples of the region. We must do everything possible to make these conflicts become a thing of the past so that ECOWAS can begin to work, unhindered, on the objectives of socio-economic progress, cooperation and integration for which it was established in the first place. This is important not only for the sub-region but also for the African Economic Community, the building of which we have embarked upon and whose building blocks are the sub-regional organizations. ECOWAS, in this context holds a pivotal role.

Mr. Chairman,

Your region has spearheaded a basic tenet of the African Economic Community, that is the free movement of persons. The other regions of our Continent are being encouraged to emulate your experience. You have also made significant progress in other sectors, such as monetary integration. I salute the launching of the ECOWAS travelers' cheques. Indeed, this is the way forward for the establishment of the African Economic Community, the Treaty of which bears the name of this city - the Abuja Treaty signed here in June 1991.

This is to say that whatever progress ECOWAS achieves is a progress for the Continent as a whole. We are therefore looking forward to further progress in this region on both political and economic fronts so as to enable this region to make a greater contribution to the implementation of the continental agenda.

The OAU will continue to assist and work together with ECOWAS to fulfill the aspirations of the peoples of the region and the continent as a whole, as we build on the successes we have achieved, and as the successes come nearer within our reach.

Finally, Mr. Chairman. I wish to express our particular satisfaction at the presence in our midst earlier today, of our elder statesman and a legend in his lifetime, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. who has participated in this meeting in his capacity as the Chairman of SADC. We welcome and commend him for making time in spite of his very busy schedule to attend this ECOWAS Summit. We believe that such gestures would go a long way in strengthening the cooperation between the sub-regional organizations and, ultimately, provide a sound foundation for our African Economic Community.

I thank you.