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UNITED NATIONS
NATIONS UNIES
NACIONES UNIDAS

Time 1705 - Title:

2.

8437/8435

S P E C I A L

"U.N. - AFRICA"

a magazine programme produced by the

African Unit of U.N. Radio

(Edition No. 33)

Duration: 26 minutes 55 seconds

Date: September 1979

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79-44397

In this edition:

The importance of having an African as President of the UN General Assembly:

- Ambassador Salim A. Salim of Tanzania, President of the 34th session - a radical or a moderate?
- Thoughts on the "tyranny" of the majority and the "mechanical majority".
- Rationalizing and streamlining the Assembly's procedure.
- The non-aligned as a "bloc".
- What if South Africa attempts to return to the General Assembly?

The forerunners:

- Past African Presidents of the UN General Assembly.

-- THEME MUSIC ("HELLO AFRICA") --

SYLVESTER: United Nations calling Africa with a special magazine - the name -
"U.N.-AFRICA"

-- MUSIC --

SYLVESTER: African culture - African music - African unity - African
co-operation - African development - you name it, we have it in
"U.N.-AFRICA"

-- MUSIC --

HYMA: This is a special edition, our first special in three and a half
years. It is devoted to a man and his office. Let's go back to
the year 1961 when the hurricane of political change was sweeping over
the Continent of Africa; a change which had a considerable impact on
the United Nations and international affairs.

SLIM:
16th General Assembly session
1008th Meeting
20 September 1961

(FRENCH, with translation)
I know that the merit of the office is the
merit of him who holds it. Conscious,
therefore, of the importance of the function
which you have entrusted to me, I shall
preside over your work with all the necessary
impartiality and in strict conformity with
the rules of procedure.....

SYLVESTER: His name is Mongi Slim, of Tunisia, President of the sixteenth session
of the United Nations General Assembly.

HYMA: His election to that office was significant for the African Continent.

SLIM:
(ibid.)

(FRENCH, with translation)
I am profoundly convinced that my brothers
in Asia and Africa, and especially my African
brothers will regard this honour as their own,
since this is the first time in the
Organization's history that a man from Africa
has been elected President of this Assembly.

HYMA: Mongi Slim, in 1961. Three years later, another African was elected
President of the United Nations General Assembly:

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QUAISON-SACKEY:
19th General Assembly session
1286th Meeting
1 December 1964

It is with a profound sense of gratitude and humility that I take this chair to serve you as President of the 19th session of the General Assembly. By your unanimous decision you have bestowed on me an honour which goes far beyond my humble person, for this is a tribute to Africa and to Ghana in particular, and above all to millions of people of African descent everywhere.

SYLVESTER: Alex Quaison-Sackey, of Ghana, President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1964.

HYMA: And the third African to hold that office was Miss Angie Brooks, of Liberia, at the twenty-fourth session in 1969.

SYLVESTER: Her election was also significant in at least one way:

BROOKS:
24th General Assembly session
1753rd Meeting
16 September 1969

It is not by way of an empty cliché that I express my gratitude and pride that you have seen it fit to endow me with the office of the Presidency of the General Assembly, and have thus recognized the contribution of my country to United Nations activities. This election, I hope, will also be interpreted as a measure of the role played by women in the United Nations Organization. I am honoured to have been the second woman elected to this high post.

HYMA: Miss Angie Brooks, of Liberia, in 1969...

SYLVESTER: ...and Mr. Abdelazik Bouteflika, of Algeria, in 1974, at the twenty-ninth session:

BOUTEFLIKA:
29th General Assembly session
2233rd Meeting
17 September 1974

(FRENCH, with translation)
Having had subsequently the rare, constant privilege of speaking in this prestigious forum on behalf of Algeria, a country which has been constantly renewed by revolution, how could I ever have imagined that one day, sitting in this chair, I would, with your consent, be called upon to assume the honour of presiding for a time over the destinies of our Organization.

HYMA: That was in 1974. Now, 1979, another African is in the chair as President of the thirty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly: Salim Ahmed Salim, of Tanzania. The following is a special

HYMA (cont'd): "UN-Africa" interview with Mr. Salim. We asked him: "Does it make any difference which region of the world the President of the General Assembly is from?":

SALIM/ROWE :
"UN-Africa" Interview
September 1979

Salim: Now, the answer to that is both yes and no. No, it doesn't make any difference to the extent that the President of the Assembly is the President of the Assembly. Therefore he is not a President of a given region. He represents the aspirations and the expectations of the entire Assembly, and any President must take that into account, that he is elected not by a given region, he is elected not to serve a specific region, he is elected to serve the whole Assembly and the whole international community. So I think to that extent all Presidents, irrespective of the region they come from, once they assume the position of the presidency, become President of the Assembly. But also I said yes, it does make a difference somewhat in terms of the different backgrounds of people, the different experiences the people have had and the differences and priorities that they themselves may have put into their own perspective or problems, and quite clearly I would say that any President (and there have been four Presidents before me who are from Africa) have taken into account the historical background of our Continent, the sufferings which our people have endured. Naturally, that type of background is a factor which guides one and helps one, and reminds one of one's responsibilities. So there is this, in a sense, in terms of -- perhaps of emphasis, in terms of nuances, in terms of style, there could be some difference in respect to what region one comes from.

Rowe: How were you chosen for this job?

Salim: Well, I think in terms of how it went about, my Government submitted my candidature, and since it is Africa's turn, it was up to the OAU, the Organization of African Unity, in the first place, to accept or to reject this candidature. And since July 1978, the meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity which was held in Khartoum, in Sudan, my candidature was

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim (cont'd): unanimously endorsed by the Heads of State of the African States that attended the meeting in Khartoum. This candidature was further endorsed by the summit in Monrovia this year. It was also endorsed by the Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned States when they met in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, last year, it was endorsed again in Havana. So, actually the initial decision-making process started in the region itself, that is in the OAU. And so, in a sense, I would say the factor primarily responsible, or which led to my election to the presidency, comes back to the Organization of African Unity.

Rowe: To use the American terminology, these were "primaries", but without a vote?

Salim: Well, you could say so, and I think it has now become a tradition that in respect of the election to the post of presidency every effort is made at the beginning in the region itself to try and reach a consensus. And, once that is achieved, it becomes easy for the Assembly as a whole to take a decision. That does not rule out of course that in the event that there is no agreement, or in the event there are more than one candidate in a given region, it's ultimately the General Assembly which elects and decides on the President.

Rowe: Ambassador Salim, your election is an honour to Africa, you would say, and also to Tanzania, your own country. It is also an honour to you personally; a reflection of your own statesmanship, your diplomatic skill, which I have some experience of, and your propensity or, as you've said, your style. As they say, the office shapes the man. I guess the office is going to shape you. But first of all you are going to shape the office. What would you say, from your own personal philosophy of life and your philosophy of relations between nations; how do you think this will affect the procedure, the way in which you handle this session, which I think the Secretary-General has predicted is going to be a very difficult one?

Salim: Well, I don't know frankly whether I can say I have a personal philosophy of my own. I could say that my experience, my philosophy is shaped by the experiences and philosophy of my country, and to a very great extent of my Continent also. But, above all, I think the

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim (cont'd): experience that I have accumulated in the United Nations - and I have been here for nine years now - the contacts I have made, the problems I have encountered, these have all come to somehow help me to understand on a more wider horizon, the nature of international relations, the importance of the interdependence of nations, genuine interdependence. And so, I would hope that this experience that I have gained and my own personal commitment to the United Nations, and what it stands for, would be the guiding lines for whatever modest contribution I can make to the work of the Organization. I think if I can talk in terms of one's asset, or one important factor which can help to guide one in this position of responsibility, I would say my attachment and my genuine commitment, my genuine attachment to the United Nations itself and what it stands for, to the belief which I hold very dearly on the importance of genuine co-operation among nations; the belief that I hold through experience, and through knowledge of the realities of the international situation today, that really there is no other alternative but to try and devise the means and the ways to work together, nations to work together, people to try and accommodate each other; we can't agree on everything, but try to define and broaden these areas of agreement so as to minimize areas of confrontation and areas of conflict. That would be the type of approach I would take in the forthcoming days and months of my responsibility.

Rowe: In the western World we hear so much about.. being a moderate or a radical, would you consider yourself a moderate?

Salim: Well, a moderate to what? And a radical to what? I think we are all radicals and we are all moderates, given the circumstances. I don't think that you can pin -- you see these labels are often coined by people sometimes, you know, to dramatize a situation. A person becomes a moderate today and a radical tomorrow. I am certainly a radical when it comes to apartheid, when it comes to injustice, when it comes to exploitation, when it comes to domination, and

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim (cont'd): I don't think that one can be moderate towards injustice. One can't be moderate towards discrimination, but certainly I am also very sensitive over the fact that for an organization like this to be meaningful, to be productive, we have got to respect each other's points of views, we have got to understand that there is another point of view besides yours, and there is another point of view besides a point of view held by a regional group, or held by a given bloc. So, within those perimetres, I leave it to others to give whatever label they want to give me, but certainly I would say I am, I am me, I am a Tanzanian, I am an African and I am a person who believes in interdependence.

Rowe: And speaking of liberals and categorization, you may have heard about the label or category of the, the tyrannical majority, the mechanical majority, references to the newly emerging countries that now numerically dominate the General Assembly. What are your views on this?

Salim: Well, I think my views on this are quite, quite clear. I think this is a misconception, it is a misconception which at one time was deliberately dramatized, to try and confuse the issues. I don't think you can talk in terms of the tyranny of the majority, inasmuch as you -- if you want, the response against those who talk about the tyrannical majority would be to say the perpetuation of the tyranny of the minority. I think what has happened in the United Nations, and it is a healthy one -- a healthy development as that -- is that the world is different today, the United Nations is no longer an instrument which can be used by one power or a combination of powers. The United Nations is, by and large, despite its limitations, a truly international institution which reflex the views, aspirations, of the - of one hundred and fifty one nations which make the membership of this Organization. And it is the only forum where people can at least feel equal; definitely not equal - nobody can claim that really in the final analysis all nations are equal, but to the extent of the General Assembly, this aspect of equality is being reflected, and to the extent that the Organization of 1945, when the founding fathers formed the Organization in 1945, is not the

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim (cont'd): Organization of 1979. Then the circumstances were different, the people who formed the United Nations had different priorities, the priorities today are different. The third world, as it is called, has grown, more than two thirds of the membership are people who come from the countries who were former colonial countries, and obviously they assert themselves, they assert their right to self-determination, to independence, they make independent judgement, and clearly those who do not want to see this change would then accuse the third world countries of a tyranny of a majority. But I don't think that really, realistically speaking, you can talk in terms of mechanical majority. There is nothing mechanical in the United Nations. No one power, no single power can say categorically that it can depend on the majority of member states on any given issue, on every given issue that has been in this Organization. And the history of a number of events that have taken place in the last five years, clearly are evident of this. The controversial issues you'll find today the majority on one side, tomorrow the majority on the other side. Of course, where you'll find a clear, consistent majority, is on issues which affect the very survival of the small countries, the very survival of the third world countries. So I really don't think that you can talk of the tyranny of a majority inasmuch as you -- one doesn't want to talk about the tyranny of the minority.

Rowe: So, realistically, or objectively, no group really rule or govern in the United Nations...

Salim: No, realistically, and the United Nations you see, for better or for worse, is so instituted right now that really the decisions of the General Assembly for example are essentially of a moral persuasion, they are of recommendatory nature, except in respect to a few decisions. In the Security Council where decisions are made and decided upon, which affects international peace and security, there you can talk in terms of the tyranny of the minority, in a sense that you have -- because of the Charter provisions -- some countries which have been given extra powers. We talk of equality of nations, but

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim (cont'd): some countries are more equal. And this concept of 'more equal' is enshrined, and entrenched in the Security Council. So I would say that, rather than really bother about talking about the tyranny of the minority or the tyranny of the majority, we should try to see to what extent can all of us, collectively, try to make this institution more reflective of the aspirations of the people we represent, more sensitive to the expectations of our people, and more sensitive to the global challenges that face the organization whether it is in the field of elimination of poverty, reducing global inequities, reducing areas of tension, resolving conflict situations.

Rowe: Do you belong to the school of those who advocate revision of the Charter to the extent of removing the veto power, in the Security Council?

Salim: Well, as President - you asked me as President of the Assembly - as President of the Assembly, I don't think I can make any comments on that. I think this is up to the Assembly to decide. As an individual, I could say that, like any document, it must be made to live with the changing of times. And quite clearly there is a need in any organization, or in any institution, and a time for, to reflect and to see to what extent are the requirements of the day met by the document which we have. The Charter is no exception. I don't think we can hold the Charter as a sacrosanct, untouchable document. And already the Charter itself has been revised, to some extent. I mean, when the Organization started the membership of the Security Council is not today what it was envisaged before. And so, as days go by and as the areas of confrontation are reduced, and when people sit down seriously and examine the problems as they arise, I am sure that the logical conclusion would be that there is a need to make some modifications here even in respect to the Charter itself.

Rowe: Some delegates feel that they are not too well, they are not too satisfied with the procedure in the General Assembly, do you have some suggestions as to how the procedures of the Assembly could be rationalized, or streamlined?

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim: Well, this one of the shortcomings, I think of the Assembly, and shortcomings of the Organization, that is all of us, without exception, everybody is not satisfied with some of the things that are going on I mean, but I hope that in this session perhaps we may try to make a serious beginning to overcome some of the shortcomings. If I were to give a simplistic example, I think we need to examine very seriously the decisions that we adopt in the United Nations, to what extent are these decisions understood and meet our people? To what extent do the common people, do the public opinion address themselves or understand what is going on in New York. And this is important. Why is it important? It is important because the United Nations is what its member states make it. The shortcomings of the Organization are not the shortcomings of the institution, they are the shortcomings of the member states which reflect themselves into the institution, and where there are some resistance to change, whether in terms of the implementation of the decisions we collectively adopt, or in terms of modifying certain things which we want to modify, where member states are still reluctant, the pressure of public opinion in their respective societies could always help. Well, these pressures can always come if people understand what is going on in the United Nations. I think that's one area we can improve. Another area, of course, quite clearly, is the whole procedure of our proceedings, in terms of starting meetings, in terms of combining items together, in terms of trying to make sure that the modalities of informal consultations, and consultations, are more effectively streamlined. The Secretary-General has come out with a series of recommendations which we are going to try and implement in this session. I believe that if we are able to implement these recommendations, in terms of making our Organization more efficient, even on issues which may look very rudimentary, very simple, if we can improve on that, then we can improve on the dignity of the Assembly, on the solemnity of the Assembly, and on the effectiveness of the institution.

Rowe: What about starting meetings on time?

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim: ...When I was talking of rudimentary, I did not want to be specific, but obviously that is one area where frankly it is long overdue, that is one area which should be rectified. There is absolutely no reason, no heavenly or earthly reason why if we say we are going to start our meeting at 10.30, we don't start at 10.30. And I do hope that we will really make a serious beginning to that effect.

Rowe: I should call you an expert on non-alignment, that is why I am asking this question. The non-aligned group claims that it is not a bloc. But don't you think that efforts now are being made to make it a more cohesive group in the United Nations, through the work of its co-ordinating committee, or co-ordinating bureau where you co-ordinate your views or attitudes to issues in the UN. Don't you think that this is a step to an ultimate goal of becoming another bloc?

Salim: You could never, even if you desired to, you could never transform the non-aligned group as a bloc, for the simple reason that the non-aligned group is composed of very, very diverse constituents. It is a heterogeneous movement, with a lot of things in common, but a lot of issues also where we have completely different views. So the day anybody tries to transform the non-aligned movement into a bloc, that would signal the beginning of the ending of the non-aligned group as a movement. But, creating a bloc is one thing, which I say is out and when the leaders of the non-aligned movement say 'we are not a bloc', they are not only being factual, but they are also being realistic in that, even if we wanted to be a bloc, we couldn't possibly be a bloc.

Rowe: I don't mean in terms of a military bloc per se, but...in terms of voting...

Salim: For example, let me give you a simple example: take the question of Kampuchea, or you take the question of Kampuchea and the non-aligned movement, as a movement, cannot possibly have -- the 94 member states of the movement could have -- a common position on the question of Kampuchea.

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Salim (cont'd): So what do you do? You do the next best thing. And the next best thing is that you try and concert your views, and co-ordinate your views on issues which you have common positions: issues of liberation, issues of north/south dialogue, issues of the betterment of the millions of people who do not, who can't even make the two ends meet. Now to that extent, I think the co-ordination which is now being attempted -- and this has been going on for some time now, actually the aspect of co-ordination didn't start now; I remember in fact it started seriously after the meeting in Lusaka, the third non-aligned summit in 1970 in Lusaka, when a preparatory committee was created and subsequently the meeting in Algiers when a co-ordinating bureau was formed. And the purpose of this bureau really is to try, in the absence of a ministerial conference of non-aligned countries, in the absence of a summit meeting, to try and co-ordinate wherever possible the common views of the non-aligned countries. And I submit that these views are not, this co-ordination is not, in any way detrimental to the interest and effectiveness of the Organization. If anything, I think, with proper co-ordination of the non-aligned countries, you would have a greater input, a more qualitative input in the working of the Organization itself.

Rowe: Well, let's come back from non-alignment back to Africa. The Presidents of the General Assembly for the past few years, from Mr. Hambro to Mr. Bouteflika, have had some influence on South Africa's participation in the General Assembly. Let's suppose -- this probably is an hypothetical question -- that South Africa makes another attempt to participate in the work of the General Assembly, how would you handle this?

Salim: Well, I would see what happens when the South Africans try to take part in the proceedings. But however, I would say that the President cannot make unilateral decisions. I would act in accordance with the desires of the General Assembly. I would reflect the views of the Assembly. I would be guided in this respect by precedents, precedents which the Assembly itself wants to adhere to.

Rowe: And a final question. I said earlier that the office shapes the man and the man shapes

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SALIM/ROWE
(ibid.)

Rowe (cont'd): the office. Is it too early for you now to look ahead and see the direction of this General Assembly? How it is going to shape you, and Africa, and the International community?

Salim: Well, it is very difficult at this moment. It is very difficult because we are just beginning and there are a lot of issues, there are a lot of complex issues that are before this assembly. A lot of issues which are very controversial, some very emotional, some not so emotional but no less controversial, no less complex. My only hope is that when this Assembly is over, we can look back and try to pin down in concrete terms where we have made some progress in terms of either resolving some given issues, and this is a very optimistic evaluation, but at least narrowing the areas of disagreement so that we do not become a hinderance to meaningful development but rather we serve as a catalyst to development in areas of conflict, whether it is in the field of thorny problems like the Middle-East, or the issues of liberation like southern Africa, or the issues of international economic relations, the North/South dialogue. I would hope that this Assembly would make an important contribution to that effect, beyond that really it is difficult to say.

HYMA: Ambassador Salim Salim of Tanzania, President of the current session of the United Nations General Assembly. He is the fifth African to hold that office.

----- THEME MUSIC -----

SYLVESTER: Now, we have to say goodbye, but wait a minute - there's no reason why we shouldn't sign off with "HELLO AFRICA" from "U.N.-AFRICA". . .

----- THEME MUSIC -----