

Remarks by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim
on the African Union Celebration of H.E Salim Ahmed Salim
Service to the Continent, 2nd December 2014,
Mandela Hall, African Union,
Addis Ababa – Ethiopia.

**Excellency, Chairperson of the Commission of the
African Union, Madame Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma**

**Excellency, Hon Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal
Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Dr. Tedros Adhanom**

**Excellency, UNSG and UNECA Executive Secretary,
Mr. Carlos Lopez**

**Excellency, AU Commissioner, Peace and Security,
Ambassador Smail Chengui**

Excellencies, Commissioners of the African Union

**Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the
Diplomatic Corps**

**Distinguished representatives of ACCORD, Centre for
Humanitarian Dialogue, ISS and Mwalimu Nyerere
Foundation**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed an honour for me to join you at this auspicious occasion. I am deeply humbled by the honour accorded to me this morning. Allow me to thank you sincerely for the kind words and for the recognition given to the modest contribution I have made in the service of this great continent. I am fully aware that in its more than 50 years of existence our continental organisation has had a number of distinguished Secretaries General and Chairpersons. I am also fully cognizant of the fact that this continent has produced many gallant daughters and sons who have made outstanding contributions to the wellbeing of our people and to the development of our nations.

I interpret the occasion of this morning as an opportunity to concretize and review the shared experiences of our continent, with an intention of galvanizing our efforts to realize our desired destiny.

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At this juncture, I would like to pay tribute to the Commission of the African Union; The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD); the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue as well as the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, for organising this event. I would like to thank them for giving me the privilege of being the object of facilitating today's reflection. It is a fitting contribution to the series of activities on celebrating 50 years of our continental organisation. I have been involved with these institutions in one capacity to another for more than ten years. I thank for the recognition you have given me and this recognition is more of a tribute to our collective efforts.

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

The continental organisation has been the anchor of the responsibilities I have been charged with for the better part of my life. Whether as an ambassador in Egypt, India or China in the 1960s; or a Permanent Representative at the United Nations in the 1970s; a Minister of Foreign Affairs for my country in the 1980s, or a Secretary General of the OAU in the 1990s, a Member of the Panel of the Wise in the 2000s – my assignment, my working brief, the mission given to me has always been to promote, defend and realize Africa's goals and ideals. In other words, I have been involved and or associated with the OAU and later African Union all my working life. In the sense I have been part of this institution since its first summit in 1964 in Cairo, Egypt onwards.

As we look back in history it is a fact that we have made a lot of progress in pursuit of our continental endeavours. We have every right to celebrate. It has been a long journey in which all of us have travelled, confronting hardships, with our fallen heroes making the ultimate sacrifices; others taking up the baton, to continue with the struggle. This was the journey for Africa's liberation; the journey for the dignity and freedom of our people; the journey for the unity and integration of our nations; the journey for peace, security and prosperity of all Africans.

Out of all these, one thing which had made Africa triumph was the unity and cohesion of our states and of our people. The faith that our people had in this unity constituted a significant contribution towards attainment of our objectives. It is important to safeguard this unity and cohesion but we should go beyond that.

Today we find ourselves where we are. In occasions such as this, we need to be clear on the true meaning of this moment particularly in relation to where we have come from. Like that legendary Ghanaian bird – the Sankofa – which, in order to determine its direction when it feels disoriented when flying in the high altitudes, it turns its neck backwards while continuing to fly forward. In that flight mode, it acquires the full bearing of its past, present and future. Perhaps, once in a while, we do need such Sankofa moments as a continent!

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

Remarkable change has taken place in Africa since 1963. Indeed, long narratives and eloquent statements have already been given about the continental transformation of the past 51 years. There is this new African who is free; outside the bondage and shackles of colonialism and apartheid; striving to

improve her/his welfare; determined to forge linkages and unity; and committed to ensure peace, security and sustainability. These are tangible and physical embodiments of some of our gains, which are outstanding when compared with the centuries of our being denied full humanity.

Signs are occurring across the continent that issues which are seemingly normative as well as marginally relational, and even considered to be routine are now acquiring a material force. A new dawn is rising in Africa – It is less the Africa monopolized by states, rather it is the Africa of the people of Africa. Voices are becoming more assertive. Collective force driven from within is becoming more revealing and even causing organized change. The people are crossing boundaries and trading among themselves. Women from Uganda and Nigeria are involved in high value international trade with their Chinese counterparts.

Their colleagues in Togo and Benin are hiring industrial establishments in Germany to print indigenously designed fabric. Youths across the continent are collaborating in music and film creating a dynamic industry in art.

**Madame Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

We have made some success but we still have problems, some of them critical. These problems can be divided into problems which are basically African like the civil strife, poverty, endemic corruption, fragile and failed states the new phenomenon of extremism in our societies and so on. But we have problems which are universal. As exemplified by the burning issue of climate change. These are challenges which affect Africa as part of the international community thus the continent has to work together with the international community.

The phenomenon of extremism of all types has now grown more ^{obvious} ~~own~~ in the last five years or so. We can ignore this phenomenon only at our peril. It is important for us as the whole continent to see what can be done to deal with this.

The issue of systemic economic and political alienation of the majority of African people that came in hand with the impressive record of economic growth and democratic progress has led to considerable tension in countries – tensions between urban and rural, between ethnic groups, between the rich and the poor, between the security forces and the people, and even more worrisome tensions across religious lines. Without tackling this challenge we may not be able to resolve the problem of extremism and its accompanying threats like terrorism.

The challenges that face us now, like what is going on in some of our countries should not continue to be a one-country challenge. If we want to see the benefits

of tremendous economic and political gains that our continent has been experiencing in recent years to sustain and bring sustainable prosperity to all, we cannot allow totally unacceptable situations to continue.

Let me emphasize. Whatever the causes, whatever the excuses, nothing can justify the horrendous terrorist acts being perpetrated against innocent civilians including women and children. We therefore not only need to condemn these acts of extremism but to work tirelessly within the continent and with the international community to put an end to this menace.

Here I would like to reiterate what I said a few weeks ago in Arusha, Tanzania. The challenges facing our continent are continuing to expand and evolve. What is happening in some of the West African countries with the Ebola demand undertaking a serious reflection on what more can be done in relation to our crisis preparedness against various threats, old and new, manmade and natural disasters.

We should be able to make use of the experiences gained to deal with the Ebola crisis which besides causing significant human casualties threatens to destroy all the gains that have been made by the three affected countries including some which have done extremely well in post conflict reconstruction. Although The African Union and individual African states have started to fully mobilize the response to this new threat in terms of preparedness and dispatching medical and humanitarian support to the effected countries, we still have not been able to provide a concerted effort that we should have. As, in other conflicts and challenges facing our continent, we need to do more on this.

Clearly, these challenges cannot be effectively overcome by one country or a combination of few countries. It is always important to work together as international community but with African States and the African Union playing a key role. Fortunately in many cases this is the case but we still have to walk

the talk when it comes into financing those solutions by ourselves.

While we talk a lot about dignity and rights, we talk a lot about ~~the African personality~~, the African renaissance, about the sufferings we have gone through etc, we also need to take into account that there is a price for everything. And the price of this is that we must be prepared to meet our commitments and where necessary to sacrifice more.

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We recall what President Ahmed Ben Bella stated at the OAU Summit in 1963 “that we must all be prepared to die a little for the liberation of our continent”. In this case we must be prepared to meet our obligations. It is scandalous that until today, after all we have gone through we still have a problem where some members of our organisation do not fulfil their financial obligations. The African Union is trying its best. We thank our friends in Europe, our friends in America, Our friends in Asia and Latin America.

However, it is for me incomprehensible that Africa which is endowed with considerable resources, to continue to be in a situation of almost total dependency on external actors when it comes to deal with crisis situations in our continent. In other words, the anachronism which continues to remain today where for example the programme budget of our continental organisation has to be funded almost more than 90% by European Union and others. This situation is both unsustainable unacceptable.

We cannot continue to expect our institution with so many mandates and responsibilities to deal effectively with our problems, when member states do not invest in the institution. We recall the high level panel, led by former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo who was the chairperson of the High-Level Panel on Alternative Sources for Funding for the AU, who late last year presented the findings and recommendations.

There are a number of good recommendations in trying to limit the external funding dependency the institution has, but unfortunately implementation as usual will be formidable a challenge. Without political will and determination, we will lack any implementation that will result in fundamental and necessary changes. This can be applied to an array of challenges our continent continues to face. We need take this matter seriously and work towards attainment of our goals and responsibilities.

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

Some have called this century as an African century. A century that we would see Africa rising to its rightful position as an important factor in global affairs, I believe that this is possible, achievable and most of all necessary. Indeed this should be the clarion call of the new generation of young people who unlike in our times has more privileges of global interconnectivity

including advance communication technology, to use for fulfilling its generational mission.

Improvement of good governance is indeed the number one issue. We must never retreat from the struggle to ensure that we have capable and evolving systems that will ensure all those who lead, at whatever level BUT especially as National Leaders, be held accountable and act in a manner, which makes them truly servants of the people who have elected them to power. Good governance, democracy, accountability and transparency should be nurtured and sustained and above all be made an essential component of our societies. Africa should be in a forefront for the protection and respect of human and people's rights. What we need now is to embrace the culture of democracy and make our democratic gains to work for our people.

To achieve this it is imperative to build democratic institutions, improve our educational system and strengthen the civil societies. To this I would like to pay a special tribute to all the institutions around the continent that have been working hard to support the African Union in its democratic endeavours and also in various countries where both national and grassroots organisations and institutions have been working hard entrenching democratic values to our people.

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

Indeed we must continue to work together in striving for uplifting the lot of our people. Economic and social transformation is a prerequisite condition. In recent years, Africa has had strong economic growth records largely attributed to the comparative advantage that we have on natural resources and the demands fuelled by the strong growth in the largest emerging economies in Latin America and Asia.

However, this growth has not translated into further reduction of poverty nor income and wealth inequality as we expected. We must guard against the growing inequities in our societies, which cause resentment and despair among our people and especially the millions of unemployed young people. If we fail to redress this imbalance we run the risk of explosion and conflict. We must gradually but firmly eliminate the contradiction of a very rich continent inhabited by the poorest people. The wealth and resources of our countries must be used to serve our people and not benefit a few individuals. We must promote openness and accountability in the utilization of our resources like oil, diamonds, gold, timber and other natural resources so as to ensure that they serve as national assets and not as a curse as is sometimes the case in some of our countries.

Among the immediate challenges is how we live up to the call of greater economic integration of our continent. We are encouraged by the various steps taken by African countries towards promoting greater economic cooperation and indeed working towards greater integration. There is no doubt that Africa's salvation lies in marshaling the resources of our continent and making use of them for the greater good of our people. The potential is enormous, but we need to make use of that potential and can only succeed if we take the call for integration seriously and make it part of our daily agenda. We must always think it terms of our collective interests rather than purely individual states interests alone. I have no doubt in my mind the way forward for our continent lies in the integration of our economies making our continent a powerful force in international economic relations.

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

Creating quality livelihood opportunities for young people is one of the most pressing challenges facing Africa's stability and hence prosperity. Many of our conflicts in the future will be driven by the gap between aspirations of the people and the realities on the ground. This in particular relates to the youth of the continent. We need to recognise and wholeheartedly embrace the role of youth and women based on the changes that are taking place in the continent. It is encouraging to see that by and large there is some realisation and recognition of their capacity and aspirations, but we need to do more. We need to cultivate and empower them so that they feel ingrained into our societies. We need to provide conditions where the youth aspire to better for themselves and their country. We need to make young people believe that tomorrow will be better, because if not, we will then lose the raging battle with extremists and criminal enterprises that radicalize our youth.

At the same time, the youth themselves have a responsibility to make sure they are in the forefront to achieve those aspirations and expectations. They should also have to understand where we are coming from. We expect them to understand our history and learn from it in making their contribution.

The women of our continent have been the most resilient and dynamic force. They constitute more than 50% of the entire population. They have played a crucial role in the struggle for independence and liberation wars. In conflict situations they bear a disproportionate burden of suffering. They have played and continue to play a pivotal role in all facets of economic and social development. BUT THEIR FULL POTENTIAL HAS YET TO BE UTILISED. This vital process needs to be encouraged and intensified. This powerful force, when properly empowered and allowed to make full use of their potential will unleash an irreversible movement towards the political, social and economic emancipation of the continent.

They would certainly make a major contribution in the struggle against poverty including in the important area of ensuring that Africa is self reliant in food production.

It is encouraging that in many African countries there has been some development in recognition of women role and position in our societies. A number of women representations in both local and national decision making positions has grown. In some countries like in my country Tanzania, the need for achieving a fifty percent representation of women in parliament and other decision-making is no more a question of why but rather how.

However, empowering women to take positions of leadership by itself is not enough. We need to ensure that our societies fully embrace the values of gender equality as central to our democratic progress as well as human progress.

We cannot continue celebrating the modest achievements in this aspect while at the same time we allow the unspeakable dehumanization of our mothers, sisters and daughters. We have for so long abused both social and religious norms into tools of legitimization of unspeakable and intolerable indignity towards our women and girls. A developing society need neither tolerate nor understanding such indignity.

Madame Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we look to the future therefore, we should aim for Africa which is free, Africa which takes care of its own responsibilities and working in tandem with international community, Africa which does not tolerate extremism of any kind and Africa that our young people who are the majority feel they have a future.

It is time, that we pay more attention to the nuances of the forces and dynamics underlying the achievements, as well as the challenges. We need to ask ourselves – what have been the drivers of these changes, what are the ideals, norms, values guiding these endeavours, what relationships have been forged among the people, leaders and within institutions. How are all these being nurtured and steered towards realizing our shared vision.

Before concluding, I would like to pay a special tribute to the chairperson of the commission Madame Nkosazana Zuma for the way she has steered the organisation with the support of her colleagues, the various commissioners. Her devotion and commitment to the continent is clearly inspirational. I would like to thank all African colleagues here who for many years (some since my times as the Secretary General of the OAU) have been supportive and active in our collective efforts and struggles in the service of our continent.

I believe that what we are all striving for is to alleviate the misery and suffering of our people but even more profound to galvanise the momentum for realisation of our collective vision.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, especially my dear wife, Amne, for being there for me all these years. Without their understanding, support and encouragement it would not ^{HAVE} been possible for me to pursue the role and responsibilities that I have ^{BEEN} entrusted with all these years. Asante sana mama watoto.

Thank you for your kind attention.