



H.E. AHMADOU AHIDJO  
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Address 4

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*We convene at this pivotal gathering in Addis Ababa, confident that it represents a defining moment in our quest for freedom and African Unity. The aspiration for unity stands as the foremost goal for our continent, clearly reflected in the missions of all African nationalist movements devoted to the liberation of our lands. This call for unity has evolved into a continental challenge that we must face, as history urges us to do so. We cannot blame outside forces for our divisions while neglecting our responsibility to address them, especially as we forge our own future. Thus, a blend of emotion, logic, self-interest, and the instinct for survival drives Africa towards unity, ensuring that our united voice is heard in the global conversations that influence our destiny.*

*Questions for consideration: Why does President Ahidjo regard Unity as an unavoidable fate for our continent and the highest goal to inspire Sub-Saharan Africans at this critical time? What challenges must be addressed to effectively pursue Unity? What factors explain the shift from solidarity among African nationalists during colonial times to rivalries in post-independence? What insights does Ahidjo provide on when and how African governments should seek political unity? When does he prompt us to consider our global image amid ongoing attempts at unity? Although President Ahidjo believes in an eventual political unity, he suggested, however, that in current context, focusing on cooperation and integration may be a more achievable aim, what might justify this viewpoint? What does it mean for a group of people or countries to achieve both unity and complete independence?*

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In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 1963

Your Imperial Majesty,

To welcome your guests who have journeyed from all the horizons of Africa and no doubt to be worthy of this historical gathering, ADDIS ABABA and all the glorious Ethiopian people you incarnate are adorned with the purest and most legendary hospitality. You have welcomed us all, many as we are, such as we are, with an open heart and open arms. Permit me after the other distinguished HEADS OF STATE, to express to you our deep feelings for this welcome and to say how grateful our people whose good tidings we bear will be to yours for the agreeable stay we shall have spent in friendship on your soil. Your Excellencies,

We have come to this extraordinary meeting at ADDIS ABABA with the conviction that it must and will mark a major decisive stage in our march towards freedom and towards the building of African Unity. The concept of Unity is unquestionably the noblest and most profound aspiration to permeate and animate our continent at the present time. In all the history of mankind, the original populations of Africa have been the longest subject to the foreigner, humiliated, divided, exploited. And so, for them, any rehabilitation, their rehabilitation, can never be complete and total, until and unless they have made good this tragic period of division imposed by colonial conquests. The simple proof of this is that this aspiration towards Unity has figured and continues to figure in the programmes of all African nationalist parties who have fought or are still fighting for the liberation of their territory.

This demand has been widespread and still is, to such an extent that it has become a challenge on a continental scale which history obliges us to accept. We cannot logically denounce the Foreigner for having divided us, nor can we continue to complain of this division if once having become masters of our destiny, we prove ourselves incapable of restoring this Unity. To these sentimental reasons must be added others more pressing, imposed by the economy, by technique and policy, in short, by the present trends in world affairs. Is it therefore a mere accident that the two greatest world powers of today, Continental China, and India apart, are also the two largest conglomerations of population and as a result of industrial and technical potential? Who could deny that world affairs are influenced, whether we like it or not, by this powerful China with its 650 million inhabitants?

Is it by chance that Europe herself, conscious of and impressed by the astonishing successes of our era which are beginning to elude her, has now, after a voluntary self-appraisal embarked upon a feverish work of construction which is underway despite its own problems?

Accordingly, sentiment, reason, self-interest and in the final analysis, survival, all of these impel Africa to unite if she wishes her voice to be heard in the councils which will determine our planet's fate. Defining this objective, is to grasp ipso facto the importance of what is at stake, become aware of the complex nature of the real facts behind the Africa of today and to all intents and purposes take stock of the difficulties to be overcome if our ideal is to succeed and to triumph.

We must firstly as Africans make an appraisal of this Africa on the march, realize the road travelled in the recovered freedom, and then keep in step together over the remaining distance to be covered which will be the determining factor in our progress in this presently dangerous world, dangerous because so full of pitfalls. We must firstly take the precautions indispensable for ensuring every chance of initial success: we must, as is always the case with Africans, open our hearts in frank, loyal and brotherly discussion.

We must obtain the complete support of all concerned, free from any thought of ulterior motive, of any distrust, that deadly poison, which corrodes any and every organization. It is, I feel persuaded, no betrayal of our ideal of Unity to say regretfully that Africa of today, once so united in its determination to be free reveals its divisions to the world; at least until now free territories. There is no escaping the fact that such schisms, even if not necessarily hostile, have tended to diminish our followings and saddened friends, those who had faith in us and hoped that our appearance on the international scene would bring in its wake, together with the seal of our solid union, the message of a new world where hatred and opposition do not exist where friendship and love are cultivated.

At this juncture, it is only natural - and I hope you will allow me to do so briefly - to look at our present relations. No plan for African construction can be envisaged, however brief, whilst, alongside of us, next door to ourselves, other Africans, our brothers, are still whimpering under the yoke of the most backward type of colonialism, its back to the wall, profiting from the collusion of those who do not forgive history for taking its normal course. How can one finally talk about African Unity without a thought for the southernmost corner of our continent where one of the most saddening tragedies imaginable is being played out. Whilst the conscience of the entire world involved in this, since it constitutes a challenge to the rights of man, it is above all a nameless disgrace and insult to the dignity of every one of Africa's sons.

But in actual fact, how do we appear to the world? In spite of a strained will to unite, how different we really are? Differing cultures bequeathed by our former colonial rulers, each state differing in the way it obtained its freedom, differing in its economic structure or in the institutional organization of our Nations. Differing also in the various friendships we have made which could not help but influence our

behavior or our way of viewing things. As is normally the case, we have had different approaches to the fundamental problems of the hour, we have had an imperfect or incorrect vision of the internal situation of our neighbours. We have even had on occasions misunderstanding. We have also been impatient or too eager to help, for right or for wrong. In short, all these factors have estranged us from this basic virtue we call tolerance, without which neither cohabitation nor cooperation is possible. The hard facts of today's Africa oblige us therefore to accept each other as we are, to keep this firmly in mind and try to understand each other. Raising such questions, even in this prefatory manner for which I ask your indulgence is to touch upon the essential problems involved.

The principle of political unity is a concept that is both precise and wide-ranging which, in actual fact, cloaks various realities. It can be anything from the institutional type to a simple joint consultation and including treaty arrangements. Apart from this, in such matters, we have need of all our intelligence, vigilance and caution. In no other sphere do we so much need to beware of the haste and enthusiasm which are the natural products of our present comradely gatherings.

Modern Africa has after all provided us with a wide range of experiences for some years now, as differing as they are instructive, either of groups of purely African States on a regional basis, or of African States with other non-African States. Our continent is in fact traversing at the present time a period of intense growth. In deciding once and for all to construct this Unity, let us give this evolution the chance to work and preserve our peoples from the unavoidably baneful consequences of acts which, even though inspired by our good will, could be traumas to the normal progress of such evolutions. Nature and events are stubborn: they do not easily yield to outside disturbances without difficulty.

We must view things on a large scale, taking in everything of a similar nature that is being undertaken on our planet. Precedents abound. An inspiration which is intelligent cannot harm the originality to which we are so deeply attached and which we have to offer to the world. Agreed as we are upon the fundamentals, the question remains of the form to be given to our Unity.

Firstly, and above all things, basic alternatives are involved. We must choose between political principles; we must also choose between economic policies. In more technical fields, cooperation appears simpler. Now, to be realistic vis a vis the political aspect that Africa presents which I have just sketched in, the organization that we can give to African Unity has to be a highly flexible one. It seems to us that any rigid form of institution would be premature at this stage. And so, for the moment, let us have neither Federation nor Confederation. In our opinion, it could only involve making a complete break with everything presently existing.

What must be immediately institutionalized is the periodical meeting of all the African Head of States. Its task would be to weigh up experiences, decide upon alternatives, harmonize our policies, standardize decisions made on the main affairs of continental importance or which require a common stand to be taken before international opinion. Naturally, set up as it would be for Africa and Africans, this Conference would only comprise Heads of State or of African Governments. The proof of such Unity would primarily consist in the demonstration of our foreign action, and especially in the international forums. It follows that, once the stand we take in summit conferences is coordinated and agreed upon, we have to set up on an official basis, institutional if necessary, the African groups which are often formed solely for consultative purposes within the different international bodies, inside UNO, specialized or other organizations.

But once again, if all this is to be durable, we have to agree upon certain basic principles. We must accept each other for what we are. We must recognize the equality of all our states, whatever they be and whatever their size or population; we must accept the sovereignty of each and every one, its absolute right to exist as a sovereign state in accordance with the will of its people. This implies absolute respect for one's neighbor, this implies abstaining from intervention in its internal affairs from encouraging or trying to maintain covert or overt subversion.

Even more on the economic than the political level, African Unity will be our salvation. In the face of the activities of the combines and gigantic concentrations that exist these days or are being established, which of our countries can defend its interests unaided? Dependent in general upon fluctuations in world prices, our economies are struggling up the arduous slope of development and industrialization. The realization that we are amongst the outcasts of what we call the developing, uncommitted nations is to bring more than ever home the need for us to be organized and united. It is obvious that the sum total of our products, primary as they are may be, constitute a considerable part of the total world consumption and that the voice of a group like ourselves will have a different ring and carry a different weight. Admittedly, I am not forgetting that certain of our states have already started to set upon a purely regional basis organizations of an economic nature. Nor am I forgetting that several of us have subscribed to an association with extra-African economic organizations. Economic organizations recognize the short-term benefits to be derived in the initial stages which are particularly critical for our economy.

This is not a place to indict our policies. The truth is that we must plan and take a long-term perspective. We are convinced that the different experiences in this field, as in any other, are only stages on the arduous and difficult path, the end of which we shall only attain after patient efforts. What we need is perseverance, starting by broadening and harmonizing the concentric circles already existing: we

must attain the final stage. In this field, Africa, contrary to similar experiments that have been launched elsewhere, is well placed. It is only at the beginning of its industrialization. It can accordingly at one stroke avoid the pitfalls incurred by sacrifices, difficult to accept, requiring us to renounce specific trade routes or markets which have been closed or protected. On the contrary, coordination in our plans for development can assist states to specialize in industrial production and avoid, within the same economic area that has been created, the installation of competitive activities.

All this postulates cooperation between the existing regional unions and the development of economic activities to the scale of a continent. This implies above all a change in attitude and the determination to obtain, here, amongst ourselves and on better conditions what we frequently import from abroad on unfavorable terms of trade. Experience has proved how difficult it is to achieve rapid political integration. And so, in order to keep open the possibilities of such an organization for economic cooperation, the latter could be embodied in a separate treaty. In spite of *the* outposts still remaining here and there, decolonization has won the day. Now we embark upon another great battle which will leave its mark upon the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the economic liberation of the developing countries of the uncommitted world. This is precisely what was realized by the 17th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations when it turned its attention to the possibilities of an international conference on Trade. It is only natural therefore that Africa should also mobilize and prepare her forces: truly, she has a lot at stake.

Our continent can claim that it has made a major contribution to the prosperity of the world, not only with its raw materials but with the sweat and blood of its sons, enriching other parts of the world where colossal fortunes and gigantic agricultural and industrial powers have since been built up. What we are claiming now is not an illusory and impossible redress of the past, but a fair remuneration for our primary products and the stabilization of prices. What we demand is a readjustment of the terms of trade which are only detrimental to one side, ourselves. It has got to be understood - in agreement moreover with our other partners amongst the developing nations - that we are determined no longer to let this situation continue unchallenged.

Finally, this era in which we live has shown that our relations, in spite of our goodwill and desire for unity, have not always been unclouded. This Organization we shall have set up would be quickly threatened by disintegration if it did not at the same time provide the machinery for settling the differences which would arise amongst its members. There are examples in this sphere upon which we can draw to our mutual benefit. Judicial bodies are already in existence, such as the International Court of *which* our States are members. A Conciliation Commission could be set up to take cognizance of our

internal disputes and give an initial ruling. Differences which the Conciliation Commission has been unable to settle would be brought before the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

There also remains the matter of cooperation in spheres other than the political and economic ones I have just touched upon. There exist within the groups already installed specialized organizations for defense, transport, or telecommunications. Fearing a merger of these which at the present time seems difficult or simply premature, we could envisage a periodical consultation between management or execution boards so as to achieve subsequent harmonization and unity. In this way, we shall initiate in all fields a close and progressive cooperation amongst ourselves, slow but effectual, towards the achievement of Unity that will have been solidly constructed since it will have given the time for the different experiment in progress to mature and come to fruition unaided and find the normal way leading to their inevitable destiny.

*Your Excellencies,*

Two schools of thought, springing from our civilization that has been stamped with the hardness of steel by out and out machination, are gripping the world like the two inexorable Jaws of a vice, threatening to asphyxiate it, nay pound it, pulverize it even...Does not the entire earth live at present in perpetual fear at the sight of this sky glowing with the ominous flashes that announce that the total annihilation is henceforth within the reach of man and his whims? What is a strange irony, that matter, which suddenly discloses to us, by dint of our struggle to disintegrate it, that we are imperceptibly sliding down the slope of our own-self-destruction!

That is why Africans must testify before world opinion. That is why the voice of Africa has got to be heard, the voice which proclaims in appealing tones its love for mankind, which reminds us that the finest emotion on earth is not simply that aroused by the clash of arms. After much suffering, effort and patience, Africa at last takes her place at the family table. It is time to record our regret that empty seats await those who are still detained by the Foreigner. But we are already filled with hope by the conviction that soon they will be present besides us and with us to build Africa our Motherland.

May God enlighten us all and may the fruits of our work be such that they are hailed by the generations to come as a major contribution to the building of a world in which our continent shall have its select and rightful place.