



H.E. WILLIAM V. S. TUBMAN
President of the Republic of Liberia

Address 14

How unity can be achieved and what steps can be taken towards its practical implementation to foster a creative partnership that allows us to live and work in peace for our mutual benefit, thereby strengthening Africa's economic, educational, cultural, and technical development are critical issues that have garnered much attention, with various proposals and plans put forward. We now have the opportunity to synthesize these ideas for meaningful discussion, aiming to develop an effective and widely accepted plan of action. We hope that at this significant Conference, our collective interests will guide our discussions, enabling us to engage in debates focused on achieving the greatest good for Africa, as emphasized by His Majesty. We have gathered here for this purpose, having worked and planned diligently for the Conference. While this may not be the last conference, it is one where African leader committed to unity seek a path forward.

Questions for consideration: What is the purpose of the Addis Ababa Conference, according to President Tubman? What does President Tubman mean when he says that "This Conference has been in the minds of Africans and on the lips of the world"? What does President Tubman mean when he says at the end of his speech that, "In the great task to which we have set ourselves at this crucial moment in our continent's history, let us think like men of action and act like men of thought"? What does President Tubman mean when he says that "While this may not be the last conference, it is one where African leader committed to unity seek a path forward"? If African leaders committed to unity, but they fail to achieve unity, what will they have proven to the world, to Sub-Saharan African and their posterity? What does it mean to a group of people, or nations to be independent and united?

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 1963

His Imperial Majesty
Excellencies
Honoured Delegates

My Fellow Africans:

The Addis Ababa Conference to which African leaders and governments have looked forward and on which world attention has been focused has today brought together thirty-two Heads of African States and Governments in this historic City of Addis Ababa, in this beautiful setting to discuss and find practical solutions to some of the questions that may arise from the agenda prepared by the Foreign Ministers. The magnitude and importance of this gathering, the efficiency with which preparations have been carried out and the personal attention which has been given by His Imperial Majesty I and the Ethiopian Government deserve great commendation. We extend to His Imperial Majesty I and the Government and people of Ethiopia our grateful thanks and sincere appreciation for the magnificent and elaborate preparations which have been made for the Conference and for the gracious courtesies extended and the unbounded hospitality given to us since our arrival here. May we in this seat of the oldest independent African Kingdom be able to come near to the heart of the basic question so necessary to our survival in a divided world so that we may go away strong in the conviction that unity is not only desirable but feasible.

What will come out of the Addis Ababa Conference has been in the minds of Africans and on the lips of the peoples of the world, and since the opening of the Foreign Ministers' Meeting, a listening world has turned into Addis Ababa. His Imperial Majesty I has in His speech referred in very forthright manner and positive terms to the need for African Unity and presented the aims of the Conference to this body. How unity can be achieved and what steps can be taken towards its practical implementation so that it may bring us into a creative partnership in which we can live and work in peace for our mutual benefits and there make Africa strong in the economic, educational, cultural and technical phases of development are issues to which much thought has already been given, various proposals made and plans of procedure advanced. Now we are afforded an opportunity to create a synthesis of the whole for study and discussion to the end that there may be derived a useful, effective, and acceptable plan of procedure.

In these circumstances I would like to repeat the story narrated by one of the tribal chiefs of Liberia during an Executive Council where more than one thousand people were present. I had the occasion to relate this same story at the Accra Conference. Never before has unity of action been more desirable and urgent; never before have independent nations faced such a challenging and splendid opportunity for concerted action; never before have our problems been graver and our needs more

crucial. The Liberian delegation while having its own views, some of which will come up during the course of the Conference, has come with an open not a closed mind. A mind susceptible to reason and good judgment about the views of other States and groups. I believe that all who have assembled here today have come with the same attitude.

I crave your permission to refer to a practice sometime indulged in by delegations at conferences such as those walking out of committee of general assemblies during debates when the trend is contrary to their delegation's views. It appears to me that such actions are harmful to the success of the conference. If a decision taken is against the view or interest of the delegation, the delegation might ask for its protest to the decision to be noted for the benefit of record and future generations because there may be other matters which may arise when the interest of the delegation may be affected or when the advice, counsel and assistance of the delegation may be necessary and helpful, we lose the benefit of their advice, counsel and assistance if the delegation has walked out. We earnestly hope that at such an historic and significant Conference, the general and not the personal or purely national interest will influence our thinking and action and thereby enable us to participate dispassionately and selflessly in debates designed to achieve the greatest good for Africa as pointed out by His Majesty.

It is towards this end that we have assembled here; it is for this purpose that we have worked, planned and prepared for the Conference. Certainly, this is not a conference to end all conferences, but it is one to which African leaders imbued with an avid desire for unity have come to find a way. To His Majesty and the Government and people of Ethiopia we again pay high compliments for this great occasion in the annals of our Continent. In the great task to which we have set ourselves at this crucial moment in our continent's history, let us think like men of action and act like men of thought.