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President of the Republic of Dahomey

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We gather at this conference with hope for the foundations of African unity, a unity that is on the brink of realization. I am confident that our discussions will promote a shared vision and consensus on solutions that address our common challenges. The ADDIS ABABA Summit Conference must transcend mere dialogue and evolve into meaningful engagement and decisive action. It is crucial that we take practical steps to dismantle the remnants of colonialism. As I emphasized, African unity should be central to our discussions, as it is time for Africans to collaboratively shape their future without the divisions of imposed languages, laws, and customs. To build a shared future on strong foundations, we must eliminate all obstacles to our unity. The responsibilities of the Addis Ababa conference are both exhilarating and challenging, but I believe that African unity is an achievable goal through tangible actions we can begin here and now.

Question for consideration: What specific reason does the President of Dahomey give to justify his presence at the Addis Ababa Conference? Why does he believe that the Addis Ababa Conference seems both very exciting and also very heavy? What does President of Dahomey mean when he says, "Unity cannot be achieved in one full sweep, African unity does not seem to be a distant objective"? If African leaders agree to use Addis Ababa Conference to create solid foundations for future African unity, but fail to unite Africans, what will they have proven to Sub-Saharan African and to their posterity? What steps must be taken to achieve unity, according to President of Dahomey? What does it mean for a group of citizens to be free and united?

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 1963

Your Imperial Majesty

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen

At a time when the eyes of Africa and the world are fixed on Addis Ababa, where the Heads of Independent African States are met together for the first time, I have the great honour to convey to Your Imperial Majesty the message of friendship and admiration entrusted to me by the people of Dahomey who know full well the illustrious role the Kingdom of Ethiopia, symbol of the everlastingness of African civilization, has played throughout the ages. I must also express all the joy of the Republic of Dahomey at taking part in, what historians will call, what they will, but which I, for my part, regard as the African Summit, with a capital S. For multiple reasons known to all the Heads of State here present, the Addis Ababa meeting is for me, after that of Monrovia and that of Lagos of exceptional importance. I do not propose, however, in the following remarks to give an exhaustive list of these reasons, so true is it - and we must say so honestly - that their nature and intensity are liable to vary from man to man, from country to country and, of course, from what the specialists of present day African Political historic call group to group.

Allow me, however, to admit that we place this conference under the sign of great hope.

- Hope of seeing laid the foundation of African unity.
- Hope that this unity, so long desired by us all, will soon materialize.
- Hope that the discussions in this conference will lead us, if not to complete identity of outlook, at least to a reasonable agreement on the solutions likely to bring us together in facing problems of common interest.
- Hope, above all, that this ADDIS ABABA Summit Conference will not restrict itself to the mere "contact," to the mere "first meeting" of the two groups, as certain specialists of African questions wish to insinuate, but that it will be both contact and action, contact and decision.

The problems which will be raised during this conference are numerous and varied and all of them are engrossing. Although the principle of stating them in their entirety before the eminent delegations here assembled is a relatively easy task, it does not seem that the same is true insofar as their importance and urgency are concerned. Since I think that our first task at this conference is to state objectives, general problems of common interests, the solution of which would in consequence be undertaken in common, I would accord first place in the discussions to the task of decolonization which seems to me, at the present time to be one of the most important concerns of the foreign policy of every African State. A large number of our brothers, grouped in more than twenty territories, are, despite their cries, their efforts, and their fight for freedom -still under the yoke of imperialism. Faced with this situation African conferences, and in particular that at which we are assisting must no longer be content with simply denouncing and condemning colonialism, even in vehement languages; from now on we must take practical measures to combat and do away with the remnants of colonialism on African soil. African unity, as I emphasized above, might be the second big subject of our discussions.

It seems obvious that the time has now come for Africans, who have nearly all regained their liberty, to jointly choose the future they wish for themselves. For there is no doubt that henceforth they will feel themselves called to live together and no longer separated as heretofore by artificial barriers of

languages, laws and customs inherited from the foreigner. If they are to build this common future on solid foundations, they must now set to work to establish everything which may bring them together and unite them, in particular, they must seek simple and practical measures which, if sincerely applied, will prove far more efficacious than ambitious but chimerical project in the present context. Seen in this perspective the responsibilities of the ADDIS ABABA conference seem both very exciting and also very heavy. Although it cannot be achieved in one full sweep, African Unity does not seem to me to be a distant objective: it is a task that can be approached, that can be carried out, progressively if not immediately, by concrete and positive actions, the basis of which we can find here and now.

Inter-State Co-operation must also occupy an honoured place in our discussions. Whether it be a question of economic co-operation, of technical co-operation or of co-operation pure and simple, the African and Malagasy Heads of State will, in this specific sphere, must accomplish a delicate task. For it is essentially on the establishment of the practical means of this co-operation that the average African man -man pure and simple -will judge them good or bad and decide whether this Summit meeting has been a success or a failure. Three years of independence have shown most African countries that only real effective co-operation is of use in cases where spectacular projects fail. It seems to us, for example, that trade development is an urgent necessity. Despite affinities of blood and geography we are, on this point, still far too often strangers to each other. Certain frontiers which ethnically do not exist, have in fact by the rivalries they have engendered turned into veritable chasms. Let us, therefore, fill these chasms, let us see to it that there is greater circulation of men, goods, and capital among us, let us in a thousand ways strengthen the tie which unite us and, little by little, the feeling, still latent, of belonging to one big family will, from Algiers to the Cape and from Dakar to Nairobi, become so strong and so evident that the organic union of the different African States will occur of itself.

Other problems in varying degrees, also provide points of common interest: *Common Market, the denuclearization of the African continent.*

The principle of the Common Market - and I am talking now of the African Common Market - is now admitted by the majority of African countries, but we must pass to the stage of seeking ways and conditions of bringing it into being. The preparatory work will be long and require patience: it will also require that quarrels of precedence and pre-eminence between big and small, between the economically strong and the economically weak states give way to the well understood interest of Africa as a whole. The game is worth the candle and the experiment is worth making. The cessation of atomic and thermo-nuclear tests on the Continent is a problem we must tackle frankly but objectively. We would not be making a frank and objective examination of this problem if, while condemning some experiments, we close our eyes to similar experiments in other parts of the world. The contamination of the atmosphere by atomic radiation is a danger for humanity. Thus, we must take firm positions on all atomic experiments, be they French, American, Russian, or soon, Chinese.

For the time being, we must be realists and avoid a priori formulae. I, for my part, hope that this conference will lead our States based on their full sovereignty to a period of enhanced solidarity, particularly in the economic, diplomatic and defense spheres. Dahomey is ready to subscribe unreservedly to such a policy of concerted co-ordination. By its membership in the Conseil de l'Entente and in the African and Malagasy Union, and its accession to the Lagos Charter, has indeed already embarked on this path which it considers as the only one capable of leading progressively to Unity while yet respecting the personality and independence of each of the African States. This respect to the other person's liberty

and the principle which flows there from of non-interference in the domestic affairs of another country are, moreover, at the base of Dahomey's position in all circumstances. Your Imperial Majesty, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I do not doubt that the desire of all participants in this conference will lead to concrete and positive results, by permitting us to draw up an objective balance sheet of our possibilities and our means and to take our action into the various spheres where trade and co-operation may usefully be developed and strengthened.

This concern to build on our continent a new economic and political order will add to the dignity and well-being of the African peoples and will fulfill their great hope of witnessing the end of the absurd cleavages imposed upon us by colonization. I should reproach myself if I were to prolong this statement, which is in fact no more than a brief review of the many problems the delegation of Dahomey would like to see posed to this conference in the hope that in the superior interest of Africa and Africans, solutions to the most serious, the most important and the most urgent may be found. I shall conclude by expressing the hope that the scope of the message of the ADDIS ABABA conference will be wide enough to incite the world powers to tackle the problems of humanity in such a way that taking into account of the aspirations of all human beings. They ensure lasting equilibrium and peace.