



H.E. ADEN ABDULLA OSMAN  
President of the Somali Republic

Address 23

---

*I am truly grateful and honored to have had the chance to take part in this historic Conference where, for the first time, all the Heads of African States and Governments have gathered with the aim of fostering the unity and well-being of Africa. It is a remarkable experience to witness in this hall leaders whose vision and impact reach far beyond our continent. We genuinely hope that through our collaborative efforts, this Conference will yield positive and constructive proposals to further African Unity. The aspiration for an African Union that speaks with one voice in the global arena undoubtedly resonates with the hopes of the African people, and it is vital that we all work towards realizing this goal.*

*Questions for consideration: What specific reasons does Osman give to justify his approach towards achieving unity? Why does President Osman believe that the African States are not prepared to surrender their sovereignty to a Union government? Can you think of general or specific reasons why does President Osman would be against colonial legacy at the same time as he endorsed the idea of respecting inherited boundaries created by colonial powers? If colonial boundaries constitute the most important impeding factors to independent developments, but leaders of Africa fail to undo them, what will they have proven to the rest of the world, to Africans, and to their posterity? What is the difference between independence or sovereignty applied to a group of state and independence or sovereignty applied to a group of people?*

---

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 1963

I feel deeply privileged and honored to have been afforded the opportunity of participating in this historic Conference in which, for the first time, all the Heads of African States and Governments have assembled together with the object of realizing the unity and well-being of Africa. It is an inspiring experience to see in this hall men whose vision and influence extend far beyond the African Continent, and it is our sincere wish that by combining our efforts there will emerge from this Conference positive and constructive proposals for the achievement of African Unity. I need not emphasize the value which my government and people attach to meetings of this nature. In the dynamic and momentous times circumstances demand that African leaders meet more frequently to discuss matters of common concern, to exchange views on problems affecting the destiny of our Continent. and to align policies on international issues which bear upon the unity and well—being of Africa.

In dealing with our problems, it is necessary that we heed the lessons which history has taught us, we must bear in mind that the interests of Africa will best be served by those who belong to Africa, and whose primary loyalties lie with Africa. It would be prudent to remember that African States share common destiny, and that no state can hope to prosper in isolation. We must be resolute in our efforts to maintain a united front, and to counteract all attempt at the establishment of permanent rival political blocs or groupings in our Continent. There is an aspect of African independence that is perhaps unique in history. Having recently conquered freedom and national identity, often at an immeasurable price in human lives and hardships, we are naturally proud of our sovereignty and independence, and yet, we do not regard national independence as our final goal. We are aware that in the second half of the twentieth century to grow into independence means to grow into inter—dependence. We strive for the consolidation of our national societies, and at the same time we strive for African Unity. We lift our eyes beyond our boundaries and identify ourselves with the struggle of those African brothers who are still under colonial domination.

When we speak African Unity, we must beware of clichés and empty words. Our guiding principles should be idealism tempered by realism, vision and imagination accompanied by a sober concern for practicability. We should not be afraid to acknowledge that any form of association, federation, or union implies a voluntary limitation on each State's sovereignty. Recognizing this necessity, the Somali Constitution provided that the Republic accepts, on conditions of parity with other States, these limitations on its sovereignty as may be necessary to ensure peace among nations. As a result of past conferences and the preparatory meeting of the Foreign Ministers here, considerably progress has already been made in the direction of African Unity and Solidarity. Several important documents which have emerged from

these combined efforts, provide excellent working material for the preparation of an African Charter. One of the major tasks confronting us today is to articulate our common aspiration for unity into a political framework acceptable to all.

*Three main alternatives should be considered:*

The first is to develop a system of periodic consultations among African Governments for the purposes of concerting their foreign and military policies and raising the economic and social level of the African peoples. The second alternative is the establishment of an Inter-African Organization dedicated to the same purpose and having its own budget and legal personality. The third alternative is the creation of an African Union or Federation with a single foreign policy and diplomacy, a common defense system, a common economic planning, and a unified currency.

*There are important differences among the three alternatives.*

Under the first, each Member State, while committed to cooperate with the others, remains free to decide its policies according to its own judgment. Under the second, each Member State, within the limits of the Charter of the Organization is bound by majority decision and undertakes to contribute to the expenses of the Organization in proportion to its national budget. The third alternative is radically different from the others in that, while the degree of autonomy and sovereignty retained by individual states depends upon the terms of the Constitution, each of them represented internationally by the Federal or Union Government. What is, then, the solution best suitable to Africa today? The right answer to this question cannot be improvised or lightly given. I stress that the answer should be the right one; that is, it should take into account the present stage of development of the Continent, and project it forward realistically in the foreseeable future; it should express, if at all possible, the unanimous conviction of the African States.

No doubt the vision of an African Union, speaking with a single voice in the councils of the world, reflects the aspirations of the peoples of Africa. As a final goal, we should all strive for the realization of this objective. At this stage, however, I wonder whether the African States would be prepared to surrender their recently acquired sovereignty to a central government. In our view, such a momentous decision should be reached only at the end of a process of evolution. We should begin with less binding forms of association. These would enable us to acquire the habit of working together towards the solution of common problems and would gradually prepare us for the adoption of closer bonds.

It seems to us that at this stage of development, our common desire for greater unity among African States would best be expressed by the formation of a new Pan African organization. The

organization would have its own juridical personality and would be parallel to the regional agencies already existing in other continents, in full accord with Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter.

*In our view, such an organization should have four principal organs:*

- a) A Pan—African Assembly, which should normally meet once a year and decide the general action and policy of the organization.
- b) A Council, which should meet whenever necessary to deal with urgent matters and be responsible for the implementation of the policies laid down by the Assembly.
- e) A permanent Conciliation and Arbitration Commission which should deal with the settlement of territorial and other disputes between African States.
- (d) A Secretariat, responsible only to the organization which should be entrusted with the performance of the administrative and technical services.

An organization of this nature would provide a forum for periodic contacts among the leaders of African States. In particular, it would serve to reach a peaceful settlement of controversies and disputes among African countries; to coordinate the policies of the African States at meetings of the United Nations and of other international organization; to promote the economic and social progress of the African Continent. The Permanent Conciliation and Arbitration Commission which I have in mind should consist of a panel of highly qualified Africans, who command universal respect. The Member States of the organization should be urged to submit inter-African disputes to the Commission. The success of this machinery for the amicable settlement of State differences would strengthen mutual confidence and would prepare the ground for a closer form of association.

In the economic and social fields, the Organization should be concerned with raising the standard of living of the African people; in particular it should examine thoroughly and promptly the existing projects and recommendations such as the creation of an African Common Market, an African Investment Fund, an African Development Bank, and others. Permit me, However, to sound a note of caution. There are matters which must be dealt with by each individual nation; others may be most effectively dealt with on a regional or continental scale; others still should be tackled on a worldwide scale. Before embarking on a course of action, such as the creation of a new African technical agency, it should be ascertained whether the proposed organ would provide the best solution to the problem at hand. Any decision should be preceded by a thorough study of the financial, technical, and other practical aspects of a proposal. It should be borne in mind, for example, that the African States here assembled are members of the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, and we all contribute to their budgets. It is important, therefore, to avoid unnecessary duplication and expense. In deciding whether a new project should be launched, or a

new agency established, we should be satisfied that there is real need, and that the function is not already effectively performed by existing agencies.

I have considered it necessary to touch upon the organizational requirements of African Unity because the soundness or otherwise of its structure will affect profoundly the success of our endeavours. To ensure that our organization develops soundly it is important that we build solid foundations, and the strength of those foundations will, in the last analysis depend on the degree of understanding and good will which bind the member states. It follows, therefore, that those problems which hinder the development of relations between African States must be attended to without delay. If they are left unresolved, they could well harm relations and consequently imperil the foundations of our unity. The kind of problem which we have in mind is that concerning territorial disputes between African States. We are aware, of course, that this is not the forum for discussing individual disputes between countries, but territorial disputes are issues that go straight to the hearts of the people.

History has shown that the most serious obstacle to African Unity originates from the artificial political boundaries which were imposed on large areas of the African Continent by Colonialist Powers. We have seen how traditionally integrated societies were torn apart and how their land was cruelly partitioned to serve the selfish interests of others. It has been suggested by some that any attempt to adjust existing boundary arrangements would aggravate rather than ease the situation, and for that reason matters should remain as they are. We do not subscribe to this view for several reasons: It would amount to us condoning actions and policies which we know very well are wrong and unjust. It would, too, admit a defeatist attitude and imply a lack of courage to solve African problems. Finally, it would show that we are shortsighted to think that African Unity can be achieved by side-tracking contentious issues that are the realities of the African scene.

It is for this reason that we seek in the friendliest spirit the indulgence of this great Assembly for a better understanding of the territorial problems which face the Somali people. In doing so our purpose is not to promote discord or hostility between the states involved, but to seek a recognition of the fact that the problems deserve the attention of the whole family of African Nations. Briefly the Somali problem is this: unlike any other border problem in Africa, the entire length of the existing boundaries, as imposed by the colonialists, cut across the traditional pastures of our nomadic population. The problem becomes unique when it is realized that no other nation in Africa finds itself totally divided along the whole length of its borders from its own people.

Those who oppose the reunification of the Somali territories, attempt to portray the Somali people's desire for unity as a form of tribalism. Such opponents use every means at their disposal to rank

the Somali people as an ordinary tribe without any rights to nationhood. The Somali people are a nation in every sense of the word.

A nation has been defined as people “usually inhabiting a distinct portion of the earth, speaking the same language, using the same customs, possessing historic continuity, and distinguished from other like groups by their racial origin and characteristics.” It is constituted by inborn qualities which render it indissoluble. The Somali people share all these common bonds, and in addition, share a common religion. There is no doubt, as scholars have universally acknowledged that the Somalis constitute a nation. The concept of nationhood profoundly felt by all Somalis, those living outside the territory of the Republic, as well as those living within it. An eminent expert on the peoples of the Horn of Africa has recently written: "The haphazard partition of Somali grazing lands by Britain, Italy, France and Ethiopia toward the end of the nineteenth century separated quite literally, brother from brother, by a series of artificial and often disputed frontiers across which Somalis as nomads have to move."

By becoming united, the Somali people feel that not only would their welfare be secured, but that as a single entity they would be able to contribute effectively to the ideals of African Unity. In their present situation they cannot do so. They cannot develop into coherent whole, while one and-a half million of them are still living in areas administered by Britain, Ethiopia, and France. The Somali area administered by Britain is known as the Northern Frontier District. Last October when an impartial commission was charged with ascertaining the view of the inhabitants living there, it found that 87 percent of them were in favour of union with the Somali Republic. By expressing themselves overwhelmingly in favour of joining their brothers, the people of that region have demonstrated that they emphatically do not consent to be governed by the authorities in Nairobi. Furthermore, by boycotting unanimously, the Kenya elections, they have demonstrated that they emphatically do not consent to participate in the government of that country. It is because Britain has refused to recognize the will of the inhabitants of the N. F. D, that a dangerous state of unrest has arisen there.

The strong desire expressed in the N. F. D, towards union is shared also by Somalis living under Ethiopian and French rule. It is not our wish, at this Stage, to go deeply into the Somali territorial dispute with our host Country Ethiopia. We shall simply summarize our stand on this matter by saying that Ethiopia has taken possession of a large portion of Somali territory without the consent and against the wishes of the inhabitants. The present state of agitation and ferment in those areas will continue to fester unless an equitable solution found. If the wound is not healed, it will constitute a constant source of trouble in the region and may affect adversely the friendly relations between the Somali Republic and her neighbours. Let there be no misunderstanding about our intentions. The Somali has no ambitions or

claims for territorial aggrandizement. At the same time, the people of the Republic cannot be expected to remain indifferent to the appeal of its brethren. The Somali Government, therefore, must press for self-determination for the inhabitants of the Somali areas adjacent to the Somali Republic. Self-determination is a cornerstone of the United Nations Charter, to which we all subscribe. If the Somalis in those areas are given the opportunity to express their will freely, the Government of the Republic pledges itself to accept the verdict.

Before concluding, I should like to summarize in a few words the position of the Somali Government on other important issues. We share the strong feeling of all Africans that the liquidation of the last vestige of colonialism from the African Continent must be accelerated. We urge, in particular, that the people of French Somaliland be given an opportunity to determine their own future freely, without pressure or intimidation. French Somaliland as, you may have noted, enjoys the position of being the last French colonial outpost in Africa.

Whenever the question of independence for Africa is raised, there is a tendency to devote most attention to the larger colonial territories and overlook the struggles of the smaller ones. In our opinion, all colonial occupied territories should be considered in the same light. It would give encouragement to the people of French Somaliland and also to the other smaller territories if this Conference could endorse the proposition that the indigenous populations should be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination without further delay, and that moral and material help will be provided by African States. The continuing anachronism of colonial regimes in Angola, Mozambique and Southwest Africa is intolerable. It is equally anachronistic that the democratic principle of "one man one vote" should not yet have reached Southern Rhodesia. We are looking forward to the early independence of the peoples of Kenya, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, and Zanzibar, and will welcome them warmly in our community.

The South African Government's policy of apartheid and racial discrimination has been universally condemned. We can never rest as long as this outrageous contempt for the dignity of man persists. We continue to subscribe to a policy of non—alignment, in that it enables us to examine dispassionately the merits of each issue, with prejudice towards none. We fully support the efforts made by all peace—loving nations towards the achievement of general and complete disarmament. We believe that the creation of a nuclear free zone of the African Continent, similar to that recently proposed for Latin America, would be a significant contribution to the lessening of world tension. For the same reason, we are opposed to foreign military bases in Africa. We reaffirm our belief in the principles of the United Nations Charter, and our confidence in the Organization as an indispensable and effective force for the improvement of the human condition, As the United Nations now has twice many Members as it had when it was created. We

will continue to press jointly with other African countries for the structural changes necessary to reflect more adequately the present membership of the organization.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Imperial Majesty, the Ethiopian Government and people for the warm hospitality accorded us in their capital. May this green plateau, fragrant with eucalyptus and ringed with noble mountains, be the birthplace of a new era of understanding and unity for the African Continent.