

Vote of Thanks at the Closing Session of the 35th Ordinary Session of The OAU Assembly of Head of State and Government

Algiers, Algeria: July 14, 1999

Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Sadly, we will soon be leaving Algeria, taking ourselves out of physical communion with a sister people and country who have enveloped us with the warmth of friendship and solidarity.

We arrived in Algeria full of expectation.

We expected that we would, together, sit in Conference to do serious business.

We knew that business would be about creating a better life for the peoples of Africa whom we lead.

We knew that we would approach this business in a business-like, frank and friendly manner.

We knew also that at the conclusion of our deliberations, we would be able honestly to say that Africa has, in a real way, taken yet another step forward towards its own rebirth.

We knew all these things because of the place that Algeria and her people occupy in our collective history and consciousness.

All of us know Algeria as home to heroes and heroines. We know her as a part of Africa whose people were prepared to shed their blood so that as Africans we could recover our identity, our pride, our sovereignty.

It was therefore with great joy that we were able, once more, to reconnect with that great African leader and patriot, Ahmed Ben Bella.

This encounter with him and other combatants of the Algerian revolution was not predicated on feeding a romantic nostalgia about what has gone before.

Rather, it was a moment of recommitment for all of us and for our Organisation to the noble purposes for which so many Algerians perished in the struggle for their own independence and the total emancipation of our Continent.

It was truly fitting that that other great son of the peoples of Africa, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere should also have been with us.

To us he is truly a teacher, his powerful intellect a resource for us who must learn everyday, for ever a voice of courage, conscience and loyalty to principle, at all times reminding us that we occupy the positions we do, to serve the ordinary people of Africa.

I am also honoured, Mr President, acknowledge with sincere appreciation the tributes that were made to two other outstanding sages of our time, Leopold Senghor and Nelson Mandela.

The ordinary masses whose hopes and dreams they epitomised, yearn for peace. They entertain the vision of a life free of the pain and the indignity of poverty and ignorance. They are driven by the

conviction that not only is it possible that their expectations can be addressed, but that they will indeed be addressed.

Again, it would seem to us, Chairperson, that our own Assembly has been inspired by the conviction that the vision which we, who sit in this hall have the obligation and the capacity to realise.

Accordingly, during these few days that we have been in Algiers, we have said to ourselves we have work to do - serious work, difficult work, work that requires true dedication and commitment, work that requires that we do not mistake wishes for a programme of action, work which demands that we do not substitute what has to be done with eloquent speeches.

This is collective work that will require that we do not avoid the truth because we want to be polite to one another.

This is work which, because it must produce historic results for the ordinary people of our Continent, will require for the ordinary people of our Continent, will require that we place demands on one another as members of the same battalion of fighters for Africa's renaissance.

Fortune has smiled on us, Chairperson, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, that we have you to lead us as we respond to the historic challenges of our day, which demand of us that we make the new century an African century.

At this time, when our peoples have need for a leadership which inspires hope and confidence, when the peoples of the world expect that Africa's leaders will extricate our Continent from its suffering, I can think of none among your peers who would question the assertion that we could not have chosen better when we elected you, unanimously, as our Chairperson.

Under your leadership we must and will attend to the urgent questions of peace, stability and development we have discussed. The words have been spoken. We must now act.

Once more, we thank you, Mr President, the Government and people of Algeria for everything you have done to make the Assembly the success that it is.

We thank the outgoing Chairperson, HE Blaise Compaore, President of the Republic of Burkina Faso for the serious manner in which he approached his work as our captain.

We salute also our Secretary General, HE Salim Ahmed Salim and the OAU Secretariat for the diligent and conscientious manner in which they have continued to carry out their tasks.

Both President Olusegun Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and I acknowledge with profound thanks the warm welcome extended to us by you, the leaders of the peoples of our Continent.

As the guns will fall silent in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, so must they cease their murderous chatter everywhere else in Africa.

Let the silence of peace be broken only by the voices of Africa's children as they sing of life and peace and liberty and prosperity and the arts and our human dignity restored.

That is our prayer to the future that attends the benediction - God bless Africa!