

Statement

By

H.E Ato Seyoum Mesfin,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

On the Occasion Marking Africa Day

**May 2009
Addis Ababa**

Your Excellency Mr. Erastus Mwencha,

Deputy Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union,

Your Excellencies Commissioners of the African Union,

Distinguished Permanent Representatives of the African Union, Excellencies, Ambassadors and, Heads of Mission,

Invited Guests and Dear AU staff members,

Let me say right from the outset how happy I am to be here today at this occasion where we celebrate Africa Day— the 46th anniversary of the beginning of our effort to give institutional embodiment to our quest for unity and for promoting and nurturing the ideals of Pan-Africanism.

There were indeed efforts from Africans and people of African descent prior to the establishment of the OAU, here in Africa and in the Diaspora, for realizing the unity and solidarity of peoples of African descent; for mobilizing their resources and capacity to defend their humanity against so many types of indignities and injustice against the black race. These have assumed various forms, from the slave trade and slavery in the Americas and other places, to Apartheid here on our own continent.

What is usually overlooked is that the OAU and its progeny— the African Union— are the continuation of those heroic struggles for liberation, starting from the very fundamental premise of ensuring that the maxim that all human beings (men and women) are equal, applied to the black race as well. From today's vantage point, it might look rather incredible that even the theoretical acceptance of the validity of that maxim, that we are all equal, was considered taboo, and that in the United States, for instance, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that de Jure, with the amendment of the constitution, that the theoretical humanity of the black person was recognized. Of course, de facto, we know how much struggle was still needed until the 1960s, to ensure that blacks could exercise their political rights.

All these are not somehow unrelated to the OAU and to its successor, the AU.

The OAU, when it was formed in 1963, did not just appear from the blue. It had a historical background consisting of the struggle of the people of Africa for liberation— liberation which began with the quest for political freedom but grew quickly into the struggle for economic emancipation after the immediate realization that political emancipation alone is not sufficient for the full restoration of the dignity of the African people.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ambassadors and Friends, Invited Guests,

Looking back at the last 46 years of the process of promoting this African quest for justice and equality within an institutional format and in a structured manner, made possible as a result of the independence progressively of more and more African countries, we should feel both satisfaction and, frankly speaking, a sense of urgency and deep anxiety with respect to the formidable tasks that lie ahead, and which, in fact, might decide the fate of Africa and its peoples.

First, on why we should be satisfied and, in fact celebrate our achievements. Africa has achieved political liberation, which was fully consummated with the demise of Apartheid. We should not forget that we could say this only over the last 15 years. Should we forget— forgive we should— that Apartheid had its defenders in some respectable quarters only less than two decades ago? From that perspective, it is not only Africa, but it is also the world that has changed; and the thinking of many. And, we Africans have witnessed much.

The OAU has indeed served its historical role in contributing in a major way to the independence of Africa and to broadening the political space for the people of Africa. Of course, what each African country might have done with the opportunity that has been created by independence is another matter, but the fact of achieving independence, is something to be celebrated, and considered a great historic achievement. What has been achieved can never be underestimated, all the more so in the light of where the struggle had begun. But the struggle continues.

The establishment of the AU, as more than a mere continuation of the OAU, grew out of the realization that we needed to do more, in terms of both strengthening our unity and expanding the areas of effective co-operation among member states, particularly by laying stronger foundation for speeding up the process of economic integration. In a major way, the move from the OAU to the AU— from the Charter to the Constitutive Act— is the result of our keen awareness that the future of Africa would be in jeopardy unless, through greater unity of purpose, we managed to bring to an end the marginalization of Africa which was most vivid in the 1980s which was broadly accepted to have been a lost decade for Africa. This situation has changed since, and Africa is not today as marginalized as in the 1980s. But our situation justifies no complacency. That is why we should be driven by a sense of urgency for which our unity is critical.

Excellencies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The past decade or so has shown that Africa indeed has the capacity to achieve great things. There is no reason why we cannot have a developmental miracle in Africa. That Africa can achieve uninterrupted growth has been demonstrated over the last few years. No doubt, all the conditions that allow this to be realized are not under our control, as the present global economic and financial crisis has made it abundantly clear. That is why international co-operation and the readiness of our partners to join us in an even more effective partnership in the spirit of NEPAD, is so critical. Throughout our struggle, we the peoples of Africa, have benefited from the solidarity, on the basis of common humanity, of peoples from other regions of the world. That applies including to the period prior to the independence of Africa. But co-operation at the level of states implies also looking for possibilities for mutual advantages and relations based on mutual benefits. In this regard, there is

little doubt that more and more Africa is developing the capacity, and to possess the wherewithal, to make the partnership that it has with others, equally rewarding to them as well.

But no doubt, Africa would be a worthwhile partner for others, and beyond that, would be able to ensure its viability only if African governments continue to strengthen their unity and jointly maintain and protect the peace and security of the continent and its various regions, and on the basis of this, create the proper condition for prosperity through what we do among ourselves and in partnership with others. In fact, this is the theme of today's Africa Day— Towards Unity, Peace and Prosperity.

Africa has no option, and no alternative, to cherishing the unity of the people of Africa and fostering their solidarity. I do not need to underline how committed we Ethiopians are to this objective, a commitment which we shall continue to be true to, but with modesty, because we are convinced, this is the commitment of all Africans. The unity of the people of Africa cannot be reduced to rhetoric and slogans because this is a sacred ideal for which many have died. There is always a need to do more in this regard, but brick by brick, with a clear realization that our unity is based on sovereign independent states making it impossible for us to achieve all our aspirations in one fell swoop.

As for peace and security, and how this is so critical for Africa, not enough can be said. These have been reasons partly for our lack of sufficient developmental achievement. Let it be said that Africa has not always been the major cause for most of our difficulties in this area. But since we ourselves have been part of the problem, it is more useful to focus on our own deeds and misdeeds in the area of peace and security.

Look at Somalia, the genesis of the Somali crises goes partly beyond Somalia. People have forgotten quickly the cold war and its consequences. At least at that level, the international community can hardly be justified to claim no responsibility for Somalia, even if we disregard the universal obligation of the United Nations. Much can be said by way of expanding this theme, but it would not take us far. For the moment, what we need to focus on, is what we can all do to help the people of Somalia achieve peace and security and thus assist the Horn of Africa region and Africa, as a whole, to attain stability and positive image. The short answer is we should all help the new Somali government withstand the onslaught from terrorists and foreign fighters that have come to Somalia to spread chaos, mayhem and misunderstanding among peoples.

The AU is fulfilling its obligations to the people of Somalia through the deployments of AMISOM. At this Africa Day, we should all salute AMISOM, Uganda and Burundi, and pay our respect to them, for this demonstration of true Pan-Africanism, not through empty talks, but through practical commitment. By the same token, at this Africa Day, we should raise our voice to condemn all those who wish to attack AMISOM and demonize the troop contributing countries, both for their attempt to poison relations among peoples, and for the betrayal of the Pan-Africanist tradition.

There is an important matter which should not be lost on any of us at this important day with respect to how African Unity should continue to be sacred for the people of Africa. This is again related to AMISOM. Don't we realize that it is only an African force that has the courage, more important, the commitment and the loyalty to the people of Somalia? That is why, at the end of the day, we all have no substitute for African Union and for African solidarity. That is why this day— Africa Day— will always be a special day for the people of Africa.

I Thank You