

SPEECH BY H.E. PRESIDENT MOHAMED ABDELAZIZ
PRESIDENT OF THE SAHRAWI ARAB DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCHING
OF THE AFRICAN UNION

DURBAN 9 JULY 2002

**Your Excellency, President Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa and Chairman of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union,
Your Excellencies and my Dear Brothers,**

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This is indeed a red-letter day in the history of Africa's protracted struggle for freedom and emancipation from colonialism and apartheid and its gigantic efforts to achieve development and prosperity by putting in place a new framework for the realization of the expectations of our peoples for a decent life for their sons and daughters, which will also turn our continent into one of the most important political and economic groupings. The birth of the African Union constitutes a significant road map in the life of our continent and a great event in the world as a whole.

This event did not come out of the blue but it is rather a logical culmination of the efforts made by the founding fathers of our Organization when the cream of the African society met in Addis Ababa on 25th of May 1963 to proclaim the birth of the Organisation of African Unity as the building bloc for the unified African House.

During the past four decades, the OAU has spearheaded the struggle for liberation and independence and served as the forum from which Africa's voice was heard, embracing the struggle of our peoples and their liberation movements to which it provided every possible assistance.

The OAU was founded on the most important legal and political principle of sovereignty of the peoples and their right in self-determination and equality among men in respective of ethnic, linguistic or religious background. The OAU has defended these ideals

at the International and regional levels by forging solidarity with all the freedom-loving peoples of the world.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The OAU shall remain a prominent page in the contemporary history of our continent and its legacy will be passed on to the coming generations as a cultural achievement that enabled Africa regain its dignity after centuries of hegemony, suppression and colonization.

We are gathered here in Durban today to proclaim the launching of a new and significant phase in the life of Africa; that of economic integration and political unity for the benefit and well being of the continent in the framework of the historic Sirte Declaration adopted by the Leaders of our countries on 9/9/99, taking into account the International reality characterized by globalisation in which there is no room for the weak. Here, I would like to commend the leadership role of our Brother, the Leader, Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

Mr. Chairman,

We would not have met here in Durban today and to enjoy its natural beauty if it were not for the struggle and sacrifices of the South African people under banner of the ANC which I would like to salute on behalf of you all, on the occasion of its 90th anniversary. I would like to congratulate the people of South Africa under the leadership of our Brother and Comrade, H.E. President Thabo Mbeki who has spared no effort to ensure the well-being of his people and who has always struggled tirelessly to bring about progress and prosperity for the entire continent.

Mr. Chairman,

There is no doubt that the African Union will have to grapple with great challenges, chief among which are the questions of peace and putting an end to wars, tensions and conflicts in addition to the challenge of economic integration at the regional and continental levels for which the NEPAD Programme provides a solid foundation. On this occasion, I would like to commend the sustained collective efforts of our brothers, Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Thabo Mbeki, Hosni Mubarak and Abdulaye Wade in this endeavour which is designed to ensure for Africa its proper place in the comity of nations.

As we are gathered here today to celebrate the launching of the African Union, I would like to seize this momentous occasion to congratulate the Government and People of Angola under the leadership of my Brother, President Dos Santos for their great victory in re-instating peace and reconciliation to that sister African country.

I would also like to commend the land of one and half million martyrs, Algeria, under the leadership of H.E. Abdelaziz Bouteflika for their success in foiling all attempts to undermine the security and stability of that country in the past 10 years.

In conclusion, permit me Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Sahrawi people and Government, to express our gratitude to Africa for the brotherly support and solidarity with us in our just cause. Africa had spearheaded the Peace Plan Initiative on the Sahara which the two parties accepted, the Security Council unanimously approved and the international community endorsed. This UN/African settlement blueprint shall, Mr. Chairman, remain the framework for international

legality as it represents a democratic and civilized solution which will ensure peace and stability based on truth and justice.

Long live united and prosperous Africa from Tunis to Durban.

Long live the Unity of the African peoples and nations.

Long live the African Union.

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