

ADDRESS BY MR. AMARA ESSY, SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE OAU, TO THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF
THE ASSEMBLY OF AFRICAN UNION
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA,

9 July 2002

**Your Excellency, Thabo Mbeki,
President of the Republic of South Africa,**

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

**Distinguished Secretary General of the United Nations,
Mr. Kofi Annan,**

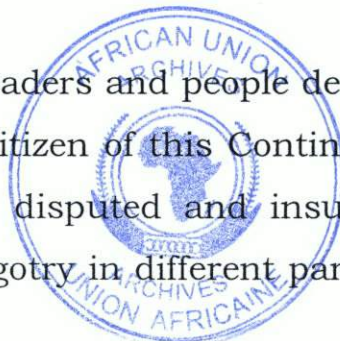
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday, here in this beautiful South African city of Durban, you brought to a close, one chapter in the history of our Continent, the OAU. With great emotions, we looked back on the history of the Organization of African Unity, to its successes but also at areas where it had under performed. In retrospect, we acknowledged that the OAU had served us very well, which is why we are here today, on this land, whose liberation from the clutches of Apartheid, the OAU had spear-headed.

In paying tribute to the OAU, we also celebrated the tenacity of the African spirit. We realized that there is no other continental Organization in the world to which fifty three Member States, had given their collective destiny for almost 40 years.

For 40 years, our leaders and people defended the humanity and human dignity of every citizen of this Continent. For a long time our dignity as Africans was disputed and insulted by the existence of colonialism and racial bigotry in different parts of our Continent. Our



collective struggle to be free and the unity of purpose that characterized that struggle made it possible for us in 1994 to celebrate the end of apartheid and the birth of the new South African miracle, known as the rainbow nation. Today, 8 years after that historic occasion, we are here in Durban, South Africa, to celebrate the dawn of another era, the launching of the African Union.

Today, a new sun rises over Africa. I am convinced that this rising sun will radiate over all the towns, villages and hamlets of our continent, bring up a single message: that of hope and a rejection of fatalism. This new day which symbolizes our future victories on all fronts, be they economic or social, also marks the beginning of a definitive and permanent reawakening of our continent and opens new chapters in the annals of its contemporary history.

All African States, by virtue of their membership of the African Union, recognize that unity is strength. We recognize also that it is only through the consolidation of our unity, that our Continent will move from the periphery to a position where Africa will become an equal and effective participant in the world economic, political and social order. Let us not be under any illusion the rest of the world will not do it for us. On the contrary, just as the birth of the OAU was greeted with cynicism by skeptics, there are many who have refused to give our Union any chance of survival, let alone success let us ensure that they are wrong.

I am of the firm view, that our Union will triumph as an innovative structure that embodies the hopes and the renaissance of the entire Continent. By virtue of the philosophy and political will that underpin this project, our Union symbolizes the coming of age of Africa, a mature continent that is determined to take full charge of its destiny. Put differently, the African Union is the embodiment of the

renewed hope of our entire Continent. In this respect, the Union will be the new framework through which Africa will advance its political objectives, ensure genuine socio-economic growth and development as well as provide for the well-being of all its people. Our Union shall be the political home of all Africans.

Following today's launching, the African Union must provide an ideal space where the sons and daughters of Africa will enjoy all the fundamental freedoms. We must as leaders guarantee our people freedom from poverty, freedom from diseases, freedom to elect their leaders, freedom to participate in the management of their affairs, freedom of worship and freedom of speech as guaranteed by National Constitutions.

The African Union must provide Africans with all the ingredients that are necessary to promote dialogue between cultures, religions and groups in order to promote greater tolerance as a norm, put an end to exclusion and impunity in all their manifestations.

**Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The African Union that Africans aspire to have, must also provide a space in which all our political and socio-economic developmental endeavours will flourish. The symbiosis in our new undertaking should render the borders from Cape to Cairo, from Madagascar to Dakar, meaningless. Today, we join hands to launch an effective and efficient instrument of collective action, capable of responding to the needs of the peoples of Africa for the defense of their sovereignty, peace and security, and for the achievement of a rapid rate of sustainable economic development and the promotion and advancement of good

governance and human rights. We need to act now to build on the progress achieved by the OAU in the further consolidation of Africa's political and economic integration through coherent institutional arrangements. In this context, your Assembly must remain the authoritative organ of deliberation and decision-making, capable of commanding the respect and loyalty of the peoples of Africa and their civil society organizations.

In effect, our Union should and must remain politically home-grown, economically developed and socially emancipated, so that we can turn around the fortunes of this great Continent. It is only by so doing, that we can make Africa a more credible partner, a respected and responsible global player in the management of our contemporary world. The symmetric relation that must exist between the Union and the African people, calls for increased popular participation in its edification. As such, we must break with the prevailing logic, whereby everything is dictated from the top. As articulated by you the leaders, the African Union should be the collective and undivided property of all Africans, but especially the women, the young and the not-so young.

In taking this bold and courageous step today, let us all bear in mind the current realities of our continent. As you are all only too acutely aware, many of our societies are afflicted and torn apart by civil strife and conflicts. In the DRC and the Great Lakes Region, there are rumblings and restiveness reminding us of the catastrophic genocide in Rwanda; in Liberia, there is an insurgency that continues to threaten the peace of the Mano River Region. In the Sudan, Angola and Western Sahara, there are some unfinished business on our hands.

Economically, Africa, potentially, the richest continent in the world, is also the poorest. How can we accept such a situation in this new Millennium! How can we fail to confront this state of affairs in our continent! I am convinced that our collective commitment to embrace the Union, is an affirmation of our resolve to overcome these problems. In this regard, it is fortuitous that as we have embarked on this journey, we have brought on board, two major programmes to help us achieve the objectives of the African Union. These are the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). These programmes especially NEPAD, have placed critical emphasis on the need for good economic and political governance and a propitious economic environment for the attainment of our common goals. Under these programmes, there will be constant monitoring and evaluation of the performance of states and a peer review process designed to encourage and enhance rapid improvements in national and continental performance.

While we welcome all of these initiatives, we must however, ensure that the convergence and complementarities that exist between them, must not be allowed to lead to overlaps and duplication. The African Union, when fully established should ensure the coordination of these programmes so that they can reinforce the Union. Moreover, as you our leaders have consistently insisted, both the CSSDCA and NEPAD must be allowed to find their niches within the overall umbrella of the African Union, so that the continent can maximize their potentials for the greater good of our peoples.

**Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

That the African Union is being launched in South Africa is not an accident but the logical culmination of the vision of the Founding Fathers of the OAU. As a rallying cry, the great Pan Africanist Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, used to say, seek ye first the political kingdom and everything will be added unto you. While it may be true that everything has not been added unto us automatically, you, President Thabo Mbeki, a leader in the liberation struggle in this country have become the first Chairman of our African Union and the torch bearer of Africa's new resolve. You are also one of the guiding lights of NEPAD and will preside over the first Standing Conference of the CSSDCA. All these come together to assure you and your great country, of your historic responsibility in the drive for the African renaissance – a cause that you have energetically championed.

In facing upto your new responsibility, you will recall those dark days of the struggle here in Southern Africa. Those who were overwhelmed by the great military arsenal of the apartheid regime, never wasted time in advising us to have a constructive engagement with the regime and to accept whatever crumbs that it was willing to offer. Our Leaders in their collective wisdom, found common cause, strength and courage in the unity of our continent. It was through unity in action that Africa prevailed and triumphed. After 40 years of the OAU, and while vigilance about our unity must always be maintained, its origins have passed into history and there are no serious impediments to greater unity in Africa. Yet we cannot deny that there are other threats.

Almost all our states are poor and weak politically and economically. Most are grappling with an unbearable external debt burden and many have become hostage to the conditionalities of international financial institutions. Time and again, many of our countries act as individual mendicant nations, not each as a part of one Africa. So each one of us and Africa as a whole, stay weak and marginalized in a globalizing world.

Your Excellencies,

Let us stop wasting time and the abilities of our people. Let us stop wasting our united strength. We need unity. Without unity, there is no future for our continent. We know it. Every passing day compounds Africa's problems and the manner in which our partners respond to our problems. We need unity for security and stability. We need it to make real that total political and economic liberation that NEPAD is championing. We need it to reduce our overwhelming dependence on external powers as if they owe us a living. We need unity to be able to take our rightful place in the governance of the world in order to be listened to and to be respected, not pitied or disregarded because we are weak and divided. The lack of unity within and among many African nations has made Africa the sick continent of the world.

Like the Founding Fathers of the OAU in 1963, you the present generation of African leaders have a sacred and historic duty to change that situation. We cannot afford to fail, and like you Mr Chairman, stated a few years ago in the South African Parliament, I am proud to proclaim on this land of the brave Zulu King Tshaka that I am an African and a loyal citizen at the service of our African Union, so let us in our different capacities begin the work of building our Union.

Thank you.

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