



**STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION OF
THE AFRICAN UNION AT THE FIRST SUMMIT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
GREAT LAKES REGION**

DAR-ES-SALAAM, 19-20 NOVEMBER 2004

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency, the Secretary General of the United Nations,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,
Distinguished Guests,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address you on the occasion of the opening session of the First Summit of the process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. My pleasure and joy in addressing your august assembly is all the greater because your First Summit is being held in Dar-es-Salaam, capital of the United Republic of Tanzania, a country whose decisive role in the political liberation struggle of the Continent, the establishment and development of the OAU and the African Union, as well as the peace processes in the Region, is today a source of immense pride for the whole of Africa.

Headquarters of the Liberation Committee, it was here in Dar-es-Salaam, that the OAU waged the crucial struggle against Apartheid. It was also here in Tanzania, that the negotiations for the restoration of peace in many countries of the Region took place. Thanks to the recognition by the international community of the eminent historic role played by Tanzania in all these processes, today, Arusha hosts the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to try the perpetrators of the first genocide on African soil.

For these reasons, I am convinced that this historical overview will inspire your Summit and enable it to take bold decisions whose judicious implementation will make it possible for your Region to rid itself of wars and conflicts, to finally focus exclusively on the only battle worth fighting which is against under-development, poverty, diseases and marginalization.

Mr. President, the proposed International Conference on Peace and Security, Democracy and Good Governance, Regional Integration and Economic Development, and Humanitarian and Social Issues in the Great Lakes Region, has been one of the

priority concerns of the OAU/AU right from the nineties. You will, indeed, recall that the idea of convening the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region dates as far back as after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Between 1995 and 1998, the OAU adopted several resolutions on the need to organize as soon as possible, an international conference, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the root causes of the fratricidal conflicts in the Region, including the Rwandan Genocide. These resolutions requested the Secretary General of the OAU to work, in collaboration the Secretary General of the United Nations, towards the convening of this Conference.

The fundamental justification for the idea of organizing such a conference emanated mainly by the regional nature of conflicts faced by the countries of the Region, the close and multifarious relations linking the Region's peoples at economic, ethnic, cultural and linguistic levels and therefore resulting in a tendency for any problem affecting one country to spread to the entire region, and lastly, the conviction that the solutions to conflicts and instability in many countries of the Region should be sought within a regional framework.

The United Nations Security Council, by its Resolution 1078 (96) of 9 November 1996, invited the UN Secretary General to determine, as a matter of urgency, and in close cooperation with the OAU Secretary General and the States concerned, the modalities of holding an International Conference on Peace, Security and Development in the Great Lakes Region, and take the necessary steps to convene this conference.

After the outbreak of the 2nd war in The Congo, the UN Security Council adopted a series of other resolutions in which it was decided that the security situation in The Congo constituted a threat to international peace and security, and that it was necessary to organize, under the auspices of the United Nations and the OAU, an International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, in which all the governments and other parties concerned would participate.

It should be noted that in 1999, Your Excellency, the Secretary General of the United Nations, appointed a Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region mandated to elicit the

views of the leaders of the Region on the proposed conference. For reasons related to the situation at the time, it took long before reaching a consensus on the principle of organizing the Conference.

I am gratified by the fact that right from the outset, the United Nations and the OAU/AU, in conformity with their relevant resolutions, worked in close cooperation for the preparation of the Conference. Thus, within the framework of effective partnership, they worked on the basis of their common will to make the Conference a success, the ownership of the entire process by the countries of the Region, the incorporation of the major achievements of the OAU/AU in the process, namely the Treaties, Conventions, Protocols and Declarations, focusing the objectives of the Conference solely on the interests of the populations and States of the Region, and finally, the involvement of all the actors likely to contribute to its success.

On the basis of this convergence of views, the two Organizations fielded joint missions to the countries of the Region. After a series of visits and due to the positive developments in the peace processes of Arusha for Burundi, Lusaka and Sun City for the Democratic Republic of Congo, all the countries visited agreed in principle and accepted the themes proposed for the Conference.

Following your acceptance of the idea of the Conference, Your Excellencies, Heads of State, agreed in principle to designate focal points and establish National Preparatory Committees. You also approved the idea that your neighbouring countries, African Regional Organizations and development partners should be closely associated, as observers, in the preparation, organization and follow-up on the implementation of the decisions of the Conference.

This opening made it possible to obtain the full support of the governments of neighbouring countries for the Conference. Furthermore, consultations conducted with bilateral and multilateral development partners in order to sensitize them about the ongoing process and mobilize their support met with positive results. It was in the context of this momentum that the 3rd Ordinary Session of the Executive Council held in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003, called upon the international community to provide its political, diplomatic, technical and financial support to the Conference process.

I am pleased to note that the unanimous support for the principle of convening the Conference has now culminated in the holding of the First Summit of the process, following a long series of technical and sectoral preparatory meetings with the active participation of the representatives of States, youths, women, Civil Society Organizations and Regional Economic Communities.

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region,

For nearly two years, your representatives in the preparatory process of the Conference, the women, youths and Civil Society Organizations of your respective countries have worked actively on the themes of peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development and regional integration as well as social and humanitarian issues. They went beyond merely making a poignant report on the situation prevailing in the Region, to courageously and with a sense of responsibility, determine the causes and propose solutions. They then couched their analysis and proposed remedies in pertinent documents based on a regional approach to each issue.

I would like to express here my great satisfaction at the fact that these documents unanimously recommend the implementation of the objectives, principles and programmes of the African Union in the Great Lakes Region. Hence you can understand the full involvement of the African Union in the entire process, as well as our strong determination to spare no efforts to contribute effectively to the success of the Conference. In doing so, I sincerely hope that your success will soon gather momentum on the Continent as a whole, and that your experience will inspire your colleagues in the other regions of Africa.

It would like to thank and commend all those who, directly or indirectly, contributed to successfully preparing the documents emanating from the thematic workshops of the different technical and sectoral meetings. In this regard, I wish to express the gratitude of the African Union for the invaluable contribution of countries and International Organizations, without whose political, diplomatic, technical and financial support the process would not

have been accelerated the way it was in the past year. While expressing our gratitude, I would like to ask these generous partners to continue to backstop the process until the full implementation of the decisions and programmes of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

My gratitude also goes to our brother Koffi Annan, who was able to create all the conditions to bring the idea of the Conference to fruition, the translation of this idea into a programme and the ongoing implementation of this programme which is crucial for the future of the member countries of the Conference process, as well as that of the whole Region. Mr. Secretary General, I also wish to express through you, my gratitude to Mr. Ibrahima Fall, your Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region, for the competent manner in which he conducted the entire process, and his preparedness to cooperate and work in perfect partnership with the African Union to move the process to its present phase.

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, over the next two days, you will consider the documents prepared by the representatives of your States and adopted yesterday by your Ministers in the form of the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region. You will translate the recommendations of your youths, girls and women and your Civil Society Organizations endorsed by your Ministers, into programmes and commitments to be achieved in the short, medium and long term to re-establish your Region's natural role as one of the driving forces for the economic development of the Continent. Indeed, your Region rich in potentialities which only need to be translated into concrete actions for the well being of your populations. I am aware of the political will by which you are motivated, which is behind your commitment to the Conference process. You have the support of your people who simply seek happiness, as well as that of the international community. With all these assets on our side, I am convinced that our joint efforts will be crowned with success.

Mr. President,
Heads of State and Government,

My confidence is based on the profound qualitative changes which have taken place in the working relations between your representatives in the preparatory meetings of the Conference. Tense and occasionally hostile at the beginning, these relations gradually became more relaxed, rapidly developing towards fraternity and conviviality, to become truly friendly during the Kinshasa and Kampala meetings. These changes show us the ray of and your youths, your women and girls, and your Civil Society Organizations owe it to Your Excellencies. In this regard, your courageous decision to welcome in your midst, your brothers from Angola, the Central African Republic, the Republic of The Congo and the Republic of The Sudan, is a perfect example.

Mr. President, the majority of the member countries of the Conference process are in post-conflict situations, with many serious related problems. However, the International Conference of which your Summit is one of the decisive phases is an opportunity for your Region to emerge therefrom definitively. Your respective peoples and the international community are mobilized to ensure that you do not miss this historic opportunity. On this very hopeful note Mr. President, I would like to conclude by wishing you full success in your deliberations.