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OPENING SPEECH OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FOURTH CONGRESS OF THE ALL-AFRICAN WOMEN'S
CONFERENCE

DAKAR, SENEGAL

27 TO 31 JULY, 1974

Your Excellency, Mr. President of the Republic of Senegal,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Government and of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honourable Guests,

Sisters and Friends,

Lady President,

It is a high honour, in the name of the General Secretariat of the Women's Conference, on the occasion of the solemn opening of our Fourth Congress, to wish you all a warm and cordial welcome and to convey to you , Mr. President, the respect of our gratitude for having kindly accepted to enhance the pomp of this inaugural meeting by your presence, despite your very heavy tasks. May I take this opportunity, in the name of our organization, to express our sincere thanks to the Senegalese Government and to the Women's National Movement, for having accepted to welcome here in Dakar the holding of this present Congress.

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I am particularly happy to greet all the delegates of organizations who have accepted our invitation and to extend to them all the militant acknowledgement of our Women's African Conference.

Dear Sisters of the dignified and combatting Liberation Movements of South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, The Comores Islands and Seychelles, French Somalia and Palestine, we are aware of the efforts displayed by your conscious peoples and of the heavy sacrifices they have been making in the struggle for liberation.

Your struggle is our struggle, and let me be allowed, on this solemn opening day, to greet you all and to revive on your behalf the effective sentiments of solidarity from all your African sisters assembled in this organization of ours.

Excellencies, Dear Sisters and Friends,

The atmosphere in which the African Women's Conference is holding its Fourth Congress and to which it is dedicating its twelve years of struggle, is mostly marked by very important events both on the International level and on the African Continent which is actually experiencing an intensification of the struggle of the Liberation Movements.

In fact, our Mother Africa, has on the 24th of September registered with pride what we all know as the Great Victory of the People of Guinea-Bissau's proclamation of Independence and the country's declaration as a State with the same name. We are all

happily hailing this sovereign act which is a reality expressed by deeds. This legitimate act of the people of Guinea-Bissau is more than an honour to the memory of the Great Freedom Fighter, this dignified and immortal Son of Africa in the person of Comrade Amilcar Cabral, assassinated on the 20th of January, 1973, by the enemies of free and independent Africa.

This great current which has been blowing over Guinea-Bissau and skimmed the surface of Portugal, on the 24th of April, will surely accelerate the liberation of the peoples of Mozambique, Angola, The Cap Verde Islands, San Tomé Príncipe and will consequently bear some influence on the evolution of the situation in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania where the ANC, the SWAPO, the ZPU and the ZANU, which organizations have relentlessly decided to intensify their struggles against the racist white minority regimes of Pretoria and Salisbury.

Similar to the situation in East Africa, the Comores Islands, the Seychelles Islands, in French Somalia and as in some territories of the Sahara under colonial domination, the liberation movements are winning great victories.

The perspectives of a peaceful settlement of the painful conflict in the Middle-East are at hand. At an utmost high level, these should take into account the strict respect of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People, on whose behalf we are approving the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for the conquest of their usurped mother land.

Thus, in Africa, in the Middle-East, in Asia and in Latin America, the success of the popular movements undoubtedly constitute the fundamental characteristics of an historical period that within the international statut quo, marks the end of a phase and the beginning of another, full of hope for all the people^s of the Third World, which people have been brought more and more together through repeated concerted meetings organized at higher levels. The results of the extraordinary session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on natural resources, the evolution of the economic relations between States and especially the international terms of trade are all a combination of prolonged problems, reminding us of the necessity for the developed countries and the countries of the Third World to foster a mutual understanding - that is strictly indispensable for their survival.

The fortunate changes which took place in this last decade of development have also been characterized by the overall activities of feminine movements and the amelioration of the African woman's condition.

In this twentieth Century, women, having participated and still participating within the limits of some regions, in the struggle for national Independence, could no longer continue to accept a marginal existence.

Thus, by inserting closely their action within the great current of emancipation for the peoples of the Third World, they are contriving to demonstrate that intelligence, courage, political consciousness, patriotism, and a sense of duty well accomplished are not the lot of any man or any sex.

Women, after having been severely disqualified for a long time, are ardently aspiring for a better and dignified treatment; they want to become the equals of men and thus win back their social place and role in their integrality. They would like to assume their responsibilities as human beings, both on the political, economic, cultural and family level. This will-power and these demands are so imperious and legitimate that in almost all our countries, women have become active militants who are perfectly conscious of their responsibilities.

The same determination led a group of women to create the All-African Women's Conference on the 31st of July, 1962.

Let us recall the fact that in July, 1972, at Dar-est-Salam, Tanzania, this same historical town where the movement was born, our organization celebrated its tenth Anniversary. The Anniversary was characterized by a workshop seminar on the role of women in the struggle for liberation and their participation in the political, economic and socio-cultural development of their country, based on the spirit of Rabat, where the O.A.U. had just held its ninth Session; the tenth Anniversary of our movement which was the consequence of ten years of activities was for us, worth some success both

at the regional and international levels.

The seminar, to which 28 African National organizations, 15 National and international organizations of Europe, Asia and America took part, did not only reinforce African and international solidarity towards our combatting sisters and friends, but has also, above all, contributed in heightening our conscience and our sense of responsibility.

We should also confess that our Tenth Anniversary has stigmatized a very important stage in the life of our movement, for it has reinforced fully, the ties of friendship and solidarity of national and international organizations of Europe, Asia and America.

The accumulated experiences of our national organizations which are due to . tenacious and straight-forward tasks have resulted in the development of their constant action in women's promotion for peace and universal progress.

In addition to its participation in the political struggle, the All-African Women's Conference is still pre-occupied with problems of education and professional training of women and in this field there is still a lot to be done. Women's emancipation being closely linked with the economic and socio-cultural development; on acquiring basic education, adequate political training and professional activity, African women will not only be independent, but will also participate fully in the economic and industrial growth, which is the

basic guarantee for the amelioration of the living conditions of our populations.

In our respective countries and particularly in the rural areas, where little progress has been registered, women should, with the help of certain liberties given to them, deploy everything in their power so as to get away from the dark fibres of ignorance and to recover the delay.

It is with the help of the struggle that will be engaged that feminine representation shall really exist within the institutions of all our countries and thus making it possible to establish social equality in Africa between men and women.

If we are encouraged in our action by those who see through it the amelioration of the condition of our society, others would like us to limit our role within the realms of family pre-occupations, or that our organization be transformed into a charitable institution, with its subordinate tasks, visits to hospitals, prizes for virtue and beauty and elegance competitions. Whereas, in the revolutionary context of Africa, such institutions would only have a secondary role to play, for on superficially attacking the bad effects of our historic conditions, they neglect to attack and uproot directly the fundamental causes of our economic difficulties and of our social needs; for those who want women to enjoy a life different from the one they have known up till now, there is nothing like accepting to be involved in a transformation process required for the material and moral conditions of existence of our peoples.

In any given society, the place occupied by any social class is essentially linked with the historical conditions of the economic development of that society and the role it plays within the economic relations and productive forces. This is the reason why one can say that the human conditions of the African women could be ameliorated with the concrete realization of freedom, equality and of political, social and economic democracy within the African nations.

It is indisputable that the social condition of women is directly linked to the importance of the role recognized by the people of a country in the practice of national sovereignty. In other words, the more the people become sovereign and free, the better the basic principles of justice and equality are respected and applied, and the more women in society could enjoy better living conditions.

This is the reason why our organization does not envisage any limitation to the participation of women in the economic, cultural and scientific development of Africa. This is an imperative factor, for in a modern world of technicity, all the population ought to be prepared and mobilized, so that it would be capable enough to elevate the production rate for a better social life.

Africa, obliged to engage a great leap forward in her economic evolution from an economy of subsistence to a highly developed economy, will have to use rationally all potentialities and the creative energies of all her sons and daughters.

The All-African Women's Conference is striving hard in this immense task of helping women to fully play their role in the edification of a new African society. On this issue, the organization is working very hard towards accelerating women's emancipation and the blooming of her personality.

Our Fourth Congress, in the light of the fruitful debates we are expecting, shall then have to decide on our future programmes,, by taking into account the experience of the past. The Congress will search for the ways and means of tightening the links and widening our co-operation with other organizations; and also involve as many women and masculine and feminine personalities as possible in our activities.

In the scope of the preparation and the celebration of the year 1975, proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Women's Year, the Congress should look forward to many meetings, workshop days, and also multiply the visits at the level of national organizations.

This Fourth Congress would experience great success when it would be in a position of being a great friendly, fraternal gathering amongst African feminine organizations, and other organizations longing for Peace and Social Justice.

Long live the Fourth Congress of the A.A.W.C. !

Long live the O.A.U. !

Long live the Friendliness and Fraternity among our peoples !

Long live Free and United Africa!