

A SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF UGANDA, MR. MILTON
OBOTE TO THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE OF THE INDEPENDENT
AFRICAN STATES HELD IN ADDIS ABABA FROM THE
22ND TO THE 25TH MAY, 1963

The meaning I attach to this Conference is that we have gathered here to find a basis as to how we can advance the two revolutions which are running together in Africa. There is the revolt against foreign rule and economic and social domination. There is also the revolutionary upsurge which aims at giving Africa a new creed, a new certainty, a new sense of belonging by transforming the mental attitudes and orientation of our peoples and by giving them a political, economic and social standard which would ensure a better life than we have today anywhere in Africa. To me, these goals can only be achieved through a continental and a joint effort by all of us. There seems to be no disagreement that we should collectively work together to achieve these goals.

What appears to me important in this agreement is the quantum and the total effectiveness of the joint effort we are prepared to put to the task. I am in favour of wielding a heavy hammer to give a definite and meaningful shape to the things that we intend to do thus ensuring that our own people and the world at large are left in no doubt whatever as to our intentions. It is, of course, very encouraging that the mere presence of all of us in this city and in this great country is in itself an indication of the beginning of a further step in the continental re-awakening of and desire to unity Africa. This in itself is important is a definite step forward, but I submit that it must be backed with bold decisions and that we must not leave this city with a decision that will be interpreted by the outside world and by our peoples to mean that we have met here only to agree to meet again. I do not say that we must not meet again but the basis of our future meetings must be different from what it is now.

My understanding is that we have met in this Conference so as to explore those areas of agreement which will form the basis of our future discussions and guide our action in such a way that Africa will be able to project her image as a single unit. I do not think it is beyond our ability and powers to establish such a basis. Once this basis is established at this Conference, our future meetings would then take the role of framing what Africa must say and do both within the African continent and in her relations with other countries.

I say all this in full understanding of our history and the effect of that history upon each of us. We have been ruled by other people but the colonial period in Africa which began with Western Europe explorers, is rapidly coming to an end. Direct western rule on the Continent of Africa has outlived its historical functions and is now perishing in a fermentation caused by our bid for freedom and independence. We are now developing

new ideas and new movements. We are also unleashing new energies in order to give expression to what Africa is. The continent of Africa and her peoples seek a new orientation. Our main difficulty lies in the links we still have with the powers which shattered our culture and exploited our resources, human and material. We cannot run away from the fact that the economies of our new states are still dependent on external powers. But our peoples remain sensitive and proud and they look to a day when their leaders will give them full freedom. In my case, the experience is only a few months old and apart from Ethiopia and Liberia, none of us can reckon this sort of experience in terms of decades.

As a heritage from the colonial era, our people are disease ridden and poverty stricken and this has led to a vicious circle of malnutrition, disease and low productivity. A decision at this Conference to agree to meet again is a decision which does not wage a continent-wide war on the evils that we have inherited. This is a common problem to all of us and its solution calls for joint and bold effort through a machinery which we must establish a certainly not through consultation good though that may be.

There are also new and ominous symptoms of the danger that we face. Unless we are able to establish a strong central machinery, the tendency to stay away from one another and to form groupings against ourselves will grow. The growth of this tendency will help our ex-colonisers and other powers desirous of having a foothold in Africa. And when this becomes a reality the whole basis of our revolt against foreign control will be destroyed.

Our revolution must succeed. This Conference has the task to lay down the foundation for its success. I know that there are great difficulties which we must overcome in order to take a bold step forward. Several centuries of close contact with our ex-colonisers have left deep marks on us. Even in this Conference we can only communicate with one another with the help of the former colonial powers' languages. But we cannot forget or overlook the fact that the labour and products of Africa still play a decisive part in the national economies of our former colonisers and also the fact that those countries still depend on the raw materials they obtain from their former colonies and on the textiles, machines, and consumer goods which they still sell to such ex-colonies. What we have to decide at this Conference is whether our manners and even our temperament will continue to be dominated by our long association with our ex-rulers. We have also to bear in mind in making that decision the problems of poverty and ignorance of our peoples and the back-log of administrative problems which we individually seem to have accepted as incapable of solution without external aid. I do not say that there is no need for help, nor do I say that we should not welcome any assistance, but I am convinced that any assistance which tends to make us stay away from one another is against Africa and African peoples.

I am one of those who believe that this Conference would be a failure if we are to return to our capitals having only stated principles and having only disclosed, however eloquently, our intentions in respect to the need of African unity. The time for high sounding words, slogans and cliches, and good intentions has come to an end; this is the time for concrete proposals and for action.

I hold the view that however nice one may feel as complete master in one's own house the time has come, indeed almost overdue, for African Independent States to surrender some of their sovereignty in favour of an African Central Legislature and Executive body with specific powers over those subjects where divided control and action would be undesirable. I refer to such subjects as the establishment of an African Common Market, Economic Planning on a continent wide basis, Collective Defence, a Common Foreign Policy, a Common Development Bank and a Common Monetary Zone. The list is by no means exhaustive, and I hope that the Conference will agree to the appointment of a Committee of experts who will investigate the matter of closer economic and political union among African Independent States and report to the Heads of States within a period not exceeding six months.

I also consider that the question of exchange of students both at the Secondary and at the University levels merits far greater consideration than has hitherto been accorded to it. I need not recite the concrete and imponderable benefits that would accrue to the cause of African unity. I may mention the clear advantage that French speaking Secondary School students would derive out of a year's studentship in an English-speaking school and vice versa. We have got to learn each other's language and ways of living and we must catch the future citizens of Africa at the most plastic and most impressionable stage of their lives, and this is one easy and cheap way of going about it.

On no single issue has Africa ever been so solidly united as on the question of apartheid and colonialism and Uganda bows to no one in her determination to see that colonialism in all its forms is liquidated. I would go to the extent of offering Uganda as training ground for the land forces that are necessary for the liberation forces which are needed in the struggle against colonialism. I suggest that Uganda is eminently well suited to serve the three major trouble spots of Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and, if the need should arise, Southern Rhodesia. I suggest that to bring the colonialists to their senses vituperative condemnations have ceased to be effective in the struggle against 20th century colonialism in the context of the cold war. Their pockets should be hurt by the imposition of economic sanction of different forms. I venture to suggest that if the white minority of Southern Rhodesia should be permitted to declare themselves independent, the African States should promptly counter this by severing trade and other relations with the United Kingdom and her fellow travellers.

The principle driving force that motivated our ex-colonisers in their colonial adventure was economic and political power. The predominant consideration in their present attempt to maintain their influence in Africa is still the same.

We all know the humiliation suffered by our people under foreign rule and influence. We are not unaware of the battle we still have to fight to free those parts of Africa still under foreign domination and indignity. Above all, we still have the task of translating political freedom in our states into social and economical freedom. Agreement that we shall meet again and even setting up consultative Committees of Ministers will fall short of the great task. Uganda will support the setting up of a strong political, economic and social machinery to direct our next effort to free Africa, to give African peoples a continental security and to give our continent the pride and dignity she deserves.

23rd May, 1963.