

Chairperson,

President Olusegun Obasanjo,

Your Excellencies,

Friends,

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is of course not by accident that we have convened in Algiers to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the historic UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

Much as the Declaration made an important contribution to international law and the ordering of the system of international relations, in favour of the colonised, it was at the same time a product of the heroic struggles of the colonised, a signal of the invincibility of the struggles for independence and national liberation.

In terms of the events calendar of Africa's fighters for liberation, 1960, the year of the adoption of the Declaration, started here in this city on January 24 with the counter-revolutionary insurrection of the colonisers during what in France was called *La semaine des barricades* ("the barricades week"), which ultimately failed.

When General Charles de Gaulle addressed a call to the French armed forces during that week, on January 29, which forces were engaged in a desperate struggle to defeat the Algerian Front for National Liberation, he said:

"I say to all of our soldiers: your mission comprises neither equivocation, nor interpretation. You have to liquidate the rebellious force which wants to oust France out of Algeria and impose on this country its dictatorship of misery and sterility..."

De Gaulle's dream of liquidating 'the rebellious force' proved to be as illusory as the wishes of the *pieds-noirs* that they could deny Algeria her independence.

However, as the year 1960 began, these events from afar communicated the message to us that the sister people of Algeria would have to make more sacrifices to achieve their victory.

The same message was communicated directly to us only two months later when our own *pieds-noirs* opened fire on unarmed demonstrators on March 21st, resulting in what has been handed down to all generations as the Massacre at Sharpeville.

I am certain that that episode in South Africa, at the other end of Africa, told our Algerian fellow combatants for national liberation that we too would have to make more sacrifices to achieve our own victory.

As the year 1960 was proceeding towards its close, our celebrations of the liberation of Congo, which had inspired us to sustain and intensify our own struggle, were cut short when the three-months old government led by that great African patriot, Patrice Lumumba, was overthrown.

Perhaps Patrice Lumumba had sealed his fate when, at the Independence Day celebrations on June 30, in the presence of King Baudouin of Belgium, he dared to speak the truth and say:

“We are proud of (our) struggle (for independence), of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force.”

The forces of counter-revolution led by Mobutu Sese Seko finally detained the elected Prime Minister of Congo, Patrice Lumumba, on December 1. That was the last day he was seen alive.

Thirteen days later, on December 14, our events calendar for the year 1960 closed with the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence we have convened here to celebrate.

The moral of the story told by the events I have recounted is that, as Patrice Lumumba said, it is through struggle that we attained our freedom. His overthrow and assassination communicate the second part of that moral, that it is only through struggle that we will be able to defend that freedom and use it to advance the interests of the masses of our people.

All of us are highly honoured and greatly inspired that we have among us here great giants of the African struggle for liberation from colonialism to which the Declaration on the Granting of Independence gave the force of international law.

I refer here to our leaders Ahmed Ben Bella, Kenneth Kaunda, Abdelaziz Bouteflika and others, who together represent the heroic generations which include both them and others such as King Mohamed V, Abdel Gamal Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, Albert Luthuli, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ho Chi Minh, Achmed Sokarno, Eric Williams and W.E.B. du Bois.

The historic struggles led by these giants gave birth to the Declaration on the Granting of Independence. Because of this that Declaration speaks of “equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”; of “the dignity and worth of the human person”; of “social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”; of “universal peace”; of “international economic cooperation and mutual benefit”; of “alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constituting a denial of fundamental human rights and being contrary to the Charter of the United Nations”; and of the “irreversibility of the process of liberation”.

That eminent prophet of liberation, Frantz Fanon, has written: “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.”

The generations of which I have spoken discovered their mission and fulfilled it, refusing to betray the hopes of the oppressed for genuine emancipation.

This important Conference, held in this historic city of struggle for the liberation of all the oppressed, provides all of us with the opportunity to ask the question – have the generations that succeeded the

generations of the liberators emerged from their own obscurity, discovered and fulfilled their mission? Or have they betrayed that mission?

Surely it cannot be that we can say we have fulfilled our mission while the people of Western Sahara are denied their right to self-determination and the people of Palestine their right to a state of their own, with Jerusalem as its capital!

I believe that similarly we must ask ourselves yet other questions, such as whether, as free peoples, we have in fact advanced towards the achievement of the objectives of the equality of nations large and small, of mutually beneficial international economic cooperation, of better standards of life for the African masses in larger freedom, of equal rights for men and women, and indeed of ensuring the irreversibility of the process of the all-round liberation of our peoples!

To ask this question is also to pose a challenge. That challenge is that we must together examine the nature and quality of the leadership we have and are providing which should help to ensure that the ordinary peoples of Africa, rather than a self-serving elite, enjoy a better life in larger freedom; that we benefit from mutually beneficial international economic relations, rather than being captive to economic imperatives decided by others, in their interest; that we truly exercise our right to self-determination, rather than exist as neo-colonial dependencies; that we truly serve the peoples of Africa we are privileged to lead, rather than prey on them as predators!

I am certain the present generations long emerged from their obscurity. To remain true to the purposes of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence, and the heroic struggles which gave birth to that Declaration, they have the responsibility to fulfil their mission to give meaning to the emancipation of the African masses, and never to betray it.

I trust that this important Conference will communicate this message to all of us, in the interest of the African masses.

Thank you.