

27 May 1963

REPUBLIC OF CONGO (LEOPOLDVILLE)

OPENING SPEECH OF H. E. PRESIDENT JOSEPH KASA-VUBU
AT THE CONFERENCE OF CHIEFS OF INDEPENDENT AFRICAN
STATES

ADDIS ABABA, MAY, 1963

Your Majesty, Mr. President, Honorable Presidents & Dear
Brothers:-

I hasten to tell you that after the grave troubles which it has undergone, the "heart of Africa" is resuming its rhythm and is beginning to beat at an increasingly normal rate. Yes, and it is not complacency: the Congo has freed itself from that somber period that it knew following its accession to independence. This was not only due to tribalism. It was due essentially to a coalition of foreign interests which could not bring themselves to give up certain regions of our country, which geologists often have called the "treasure chest" of Africa.

At the price of what efforts, at the price of what sacrifices have we been able to bring order to our affairs? Only the passing of time will permit us to draw up this balance-sheet with all the objectivity and calm which it requires. But already we can affirm, without fear of contradiction by history, that the assistance of the African countries which hastened to our aid in a brotherly way has been a decisive if not a determining element in our victory.

I could not find a better occasion than the one which is offered me today to express the gratitude of our people to all those nations whose sons fell on Congolese soil.

Your Majesty, Mr. President, Honorable Presidents & Dear
Brothers:-

I will ask you to observe one minute of silence for the memory of those heroes, and of all those who gave their lives to assure or to consolidate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Congo.

I thank you.

These links sealed in blood are the best pacts which we have concluded with Africa, for whose concept we opted well before our accession to independence.

By welcoming a conference of African Foreign Ministers to Leopoldville less than two months after our own independence, the Congo gave to understand that this choice was being translated into fact. It further affirmed its choice of non-alignment a short time later by participating in the Belgrade Conference.

Non-alignment and an African policy which draws no distinctions have been two constants in all our decisions ever since.

We might add in this context that an insidious propaganda which has laid hold of the news of our country has relegated to second place many of our actions since independence, of which Africa can be proud. As soon as we were freed, we rid ourselves of those foreign bases on our soil which might have constituted a pole of attraction for the cold war in the very heart of Africa.

Moreover, we have never ceased to re-affirm our aversion for military pacts which can only remove some degree of sovereignty from our respective countries, limiting our possibility of choice, and thus slowing down the march of Africa.

We find ourselves today at cross roads. Several routes are offered whereby we can achieve African Unity. Which one should we choose? Each of us, in all conscience and in all humility, must contribute to the reply.

The Congolese contribution will be made in the light of an experience of nearly three years, sad certainly, but very rich in lessons for the future.

This experience has taught us that mutual confidence and respect between partners constitutes the basis of success of all efforts at unity. That is why we have avoided letting our own current national reconciliation turn into a settling of old scores. Nothing can be built on hatred, on bitterness, or on vengeance.

We have suffered from tribalism, which is not only a Congolese phenomenon, but one which unfortunately occurs in various guises all over the continent and threatens the stability of our States.

Certain circumstances have given to tribalism a symbolic value in the Congo; in these circumstances our efforts to root it out take on the merits of a test for all Africa. These efforts have begun to bear fruit. We feel it would be a poor service to Africa to believe that this improvement is only superficial. How can one arrive at African Unity if at the start one casts doubt on the gains and progress of the states which aspire to this unity?

In any case, we shall continue these efforts, which are directed to-day toward maintaining and reinforcing such confidence by a patient labor of harmonization and bringing together our different entities. We shall ensure that the particularities of each of our regions, which express the diversity and richness of a common heritage, should complete each other without conflict.

This concept is just as valid for the 21 provinces making up the Congo Republic as for the 32 states which now comprise liberated Africa.

Only an instrument supple enough to be adapted to all situations through which a country might pass -- and even more so for a continent in full evolution -- will permit us to attain our objectives.

The first of these objectives, without dispute, is to complete the process of decolonization without which Unity cannot be complete. The Congo carries a heavy responsibility in this domain. The line of demarcation between free Africa and that part of Africa still under colonial domination passes along its frontiers. We have suffered from the proximity of the colonialist regimes, but that only has served to confirm us in the path which we have drawn for ourselves.

We shall continue as a sovereign state to make a contribution, which we wish to be as effective as possible. This, I can assure you, always will be unselfishly devoted to the liberation movements of southern Africa.

This contribution, therefore, will be in conformity with the African ideal, as it has emerged from the Foreign Ministers conference which preceded our meeting. The work of that conference has brought out several common denominators for our different countries.

We believe the time is favorable now to translate these ideals into a Charter, which will serve to assert the personality of the

African continent and will allow it to play a role in the world in harmony with its true potential.

The reinforcement of the United Nations Organization is another effective way of permitting us to attain this objective.

I believe the Congo is well placed to speak of this Organization, which has conducted an unprecedented experiment in our country. The experience has been difficult, but its success has proved the effectiveness of the UNO, despite all the obstacles which it may have encountered.

The best means of reinforcing the United Nations, in our opinion consists in respecting all our obligations towards it, and notably the financial obligations.

Your Majesty, Mr. President, Honorable Presidents & Dear Brothers:-

I have the pleasure to inform you that despite its economic and financial difficulties, the Congo has just paid up its obligations to the international organization. We also are examining the possibility of purchasing loan bonds issued by the U. N.

The prudence, moderation, realism and thoughtfulness which the Foreign Ministers have shown are the best pledges of the success of our undertaking.

As a matter of fact, not only falling behind the march of history has been shown to be harmful, but also the fact of being too far ahead has been shown several times to be equally harmful. I will spare you the many citations I could make in this connection.

We insist, meanwhile, on underlining so far as economic problems are concerned, that the setting up of realizable projects, modest as they might be, is infinitely more advantageous than the best-filled book of unexecuted schemes. We must begin right now to spell out our spirations. This would be the best guarantee we could give to the 250 million Africans whose eyes are turned towards Addis Ababa today.

I wish finally to restate our gratitude to His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, to His people, and to His Government for their hospitality. This truly fraternal welcome is no surprise to us, for it is in conformity with the thousand-year-old tradition of Ethiopia.