Your Majesty,
Your Excellencies,

It is my pleasant duty to convey to your august assembly the fraternal greetings of the Tunisian people, and their wishes for the complete success of our work. For the second time within a few years the independent States of Africa have met in Addis Ababa, that heroic bastion of African liberty. I cannot evoke the epic story of Ethiopia without pride and emotion. There began a decisive battle which was destined to end, in Africa and elsewhere, with the final and inevitable defeat of colonialism. Allow me, from this tribune, to pay a whole hearted tribute to the inflexible will and indomitable courage of His Majesty, the Emperor Haile Selassie, the man who yesterday saved the honour of Africa and who, today, is placing his wisdom and experience at the service of its great designs.

We have come here desirous of examining and, if possible, resolving together problems of common interest. Our problems are numerous and difficult; of that we grow each day more vividly aware. But these problems, amount essentially to three predominant concers: to complete the decolonization of the continent.

To mobilize all material and moral resources in order effectively to combat underdevelopment.

To lay the foundations of that African unity, which is taking shape naturally.

To set the seal on the political and economic emancipation of Africa.

These three propositions are closely complementary. On the universal scale, they represent three necessary stages in man's internal struggle for human dignity.

I. THE DECOLONIZATION OF AFRICA

The majority of African countries represented here are independent, sovereign states. Like a 'peau de chagrin', the shadow of colonial domination is shrinking visibly away. Thrust back upon its last redoubts, colonialism exhausts itself in savage and useless rear guard actions, or founders in blind hatred. Repression is rife in Angola and South
Africa. The fires are smouldering in Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia. Confronted with such an alarming situation, the duty of the independent countries of Africa is clear:

We must strengthen by every possible means action taken under the aegis and auspices of the United Nations, provide sufficient continuous aid to the peoples who are fighting for their freedom, and made untenable the position of the last colonial enclaves in Africa, until liberation is achieved.

It is not perhaps out of place to mention here that, as we see it, decolonization implies not only the end of all forms of colonial domination, but also the elimination of all those consequences which tend to perpetuate the influence of colonialism and to encourage its aims, avowed or clandestine. It often occurs that when, political emancipation is won, there is no clear-cut frontier between dependence and freedom. Firm and persevering action is then called for in order to eliminate, one by one, the consequences of colonial status, and restore its full meaning and all its prerogatives to independence.

Such action is not without risks. But we have judged it necessary, whatever the price, as independence - the first stage in the reconquest of human dignity - makes people the masters of their own destiny. After independence, all things become possible. And in particular, methodical, coherent and sustained action to improve the moral and material condition of men.

II. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST UNDER-DEVELOPMENT

In such a perspective, independence no longer appears as an end in itself, but as the solemn proclamation of an irresistible aspiration of the peoples towards well-being and progress. Independence establishes claim to dignity but does not entirely satisfy that claim. Because dignity is really only accessible to people freed from hunger, sickness and ignorance. In these conditions, the political emancipation of Africa can be no more than the necessary prelude to the mobilization of energies and resources with a view to raising men to a higher moral and material level.

The struggle against under-development which has been begun on the whole African continent is an undertaking of exceptional scope.
It calls for:

(1) Thorough and vigorous action on mental structures with a view to reforming the economic and social structures.

(2) Outside assistance in the form of capital and cadres, and therefore as well-balanced co-operation as possible with the industrialized countries.

(3) Active and fruitful co-operation with the other countries of the African continent.

I. Action on structures and habits built up over a long period of stagnation reflects, in each case, the economic and social orientation of local policies. A fairly general effort to explore the African way to socialism may, however, be perceived. The aim of that action is to bring about a condition of world consciousness and to prepare humanity to tackle the tasks of development.

II. Co-operation with the industrialized countries, rich in capital, cadres and technical experience, is not only desirable but inevitable for developing countries. There is no alternative. The refusal of such co-operation through fear of a revival of colonialism is a position which can be justified from the sentimental point of view or that of pure logic. But all the same the attitude is unrealistic. Accepting the assistance of former colonial powers does sometimes mean running a real risk, I admit. But refusing it means isolating oneself and condemning oneself to stagnation.

I think it is possible to find a way out of this dilemma. Provided one is really determined to put an end to dependence as soon as one is in a position to do so, one must accept co-operation even if that co-operation is not always balanced to start off with. If one accepts it all the same in full understanding of what it means, it is because it is the only way of freeing oneself of dependence. Otherwise, the paralyzing fear of neo-colonialism might well keep newly liberated countries in a state of chronic weakness and therefore of prolonged dependence.

Between co-operation accepted as a means of attaining freedom through economic and social progress and co-operation which serves as a facade for neo-colonialism, the difference is not of kind but of the final objective. It is above all a
matter of conscience for those in authority, who accept it. It is because we know what we want and where we are going that we have never had any complexes. The independence of Tunisia has never suffered thereby. On the contrary:

If co-operation between African countries and industrialized countries on a bilateral basis is the most usual in spite of the risks it may entail co-operation with economic unities has a chance of being better balanced and less suspect.

The ideal would obviously be for external aid of whatever origin to be distributed by the United Nations and under its aegis. If aid to under-developed countries were given an international character, it would no longer be suspected of serving the ends of the cold war. Unfortunately there does not seem much possibility of such a solution being adopted. In the present state of affairs and due to the urgent needs of developing countries, we cannot do otherwise than accept assistance from the developed countries while insisting on the fact that such aid is in the recognized interest of those who supply it and those who receive it. It is a bridge thrown across the abyss of inequalities. The better-off countries must be aware of the dangers menacing world peace so long as Humanity is divided into the under-fed and the well-fed and so long as the gap between these two sections of humanity is only accentuated by the results of a population explosion affecting the under-fed section.

III. Insofar as co-operation between African countries is concerned we are still at the approach stage. Divisions, differences in tradition and language inherited from the colonial era, inadequacy of transport and communication systems, particularisms, mental reservations and sometimes misunderstandings have hardly furthered the progress of inter-African co-operation. In its principle and effects however that co-operation remains eminently desirable.

Everyone recognizes the urgency of concerted action on foreign markets. No one seriously questions the necessity of organizing domestic markets large enough to support a drive towards industrialization, which is still the surest way of rescuing African economies from under-development.

Everything, therefore, encourages us to come together, to explore in common the prospects of a necessary and fruitful co-operation to confront our experiences and ideas, to multiply our trade and contacts, thereby indefinitely extending the field of common interest.
Encouraging results have already been noted, thanks to the effective and methodical action of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Such action must be supported and its field of application extended to precise spheres in such a way as to emphasize the solidarity of interests and furnish proof of inter-dependence, which alone will prepare the way for unity.

III. AFRICAN UNITY

In a continent barely emerging from the colonial era, enfeebled and divided, unity has, of necessity, a penetrating resonence and great power of attraction. But it is still an ideal towards which we are tending and for which we must act.

Speaking for ourselves, we prefer to see things as they are. We hardly know each other and we have barely had time to draw up an inventory of the things which bring us together and those which divide us. We have to break down all divisions inherited from the colonial era. It must not be forgotten that for a very long time Africa was a continent open to the world and closed to itself.

To postulate unity as an imminent, straightforward thing, which will be achieved by adopting a motion, or manifesto, or by elaborating a constitui9n, may lead to disappointments.

We must build on reality, and reality is that the peoples of Africa are aspiring towards a certain unity of purpose, expression of a common awareness of the continent's problems.

Such unity of purpose is possible here and now. It may emerge from our debates. It may help us to take up a common stand in international affairs, to identify our aims, to co-ordinate our efforts and harmonize our trends in the fight for economic and social progress.

Let us, all together, serve our apprenticeship to unity! Know ourselves better, hold each other in esteem, understand each other's problems and the interest of all. Minds must become accustomed to the idea of unity and its practical and moral implications. A sober psychological preparation is necessary, without which nothing of value can be done.

For unity, in the final analysis, can only come from the consent - the real, profound and freely expressed consent, - of the people. It can never be imposed by means of force or subversion, serving a desire for supremacy. The desire for
supremacy is the worm in the bud. When one partner wishes to dominate a group, sooner or later that group will fall apart. The experience of recent years bears witness to this fact.

We do not believe that it is in Africa's interest to invite misfortunes of that sort. Unity is a work that takes time. The Pace of history must not be forced. We must build solidly on a basis of popular consent, mutual esteem and respect for all sovereignties. Nothing lasting can be forged in the fire of hasty improvisation or and lambent sentiment. African unity will be built by frank collaboration, honest negotiation and democracy. This is my wish for the future of our continent.

Tunisia, which hopes to have won your respect by its realism, its sense of moderation and its constant devotion to the cause of liberty and progress in Africa, is still prepared to do anything that may help us to take the first step on the road to African unity.

Experiments are in progress in certain regions of Africa which, through periodic contacts, are helping to organize limited co-operation in certain technical fields, or the progressive establishment of an integrated economic unit. Moreover, we have seen more ambitious and more spectacular attempts in Africa towards a greater degree of integration. They fell short, and eventually led to a slight retreat in the concept of unity.

Whatever the case, regional agreements have an important part to play in the development of Africa. We know that the industrial countries, which provide technical assistance and capital, would rather deal with groups than with separate countries. Moreover, it is easier for countries combined in a unit to harmonize their economic and social policies within the framework of joint programmes. Thus regional agreements further both the planning of external assistance and that of their own development.

For all these reasons, and for others arising from the many affinities existing between our peoples, we long ago planned to set up in North Africa the great Arab Maghreb. However, we had to wait until the end of the long Algerian war.

With time, we hope to be able to overcome the final obstacles, and set up a valid and liable Maghreb unit, which can greatly reinforce that African unity whose foundations we
we must here lay.

This Conference, like many before it, may well conclude, after many eloquent speeches and lively debates with a number of motions forthright statements of position, and declarations of intention, which will in no way alter the situation in Africa.

But if you are willing, our Conference can be the exception to the rule

In that case it will be decisive for the future of our continent. We must transcend our differences, realise our solidarity, and definitely and sincerely base our relations on understanding, trust and respect for sovereignty.

Concrete proposals have been made, discussed and drawn up by our Foreign Ministers. We shall not separate until we have perfected them. Then it will be our task to implement them methodically.

It is not out of some vague feeling of scepticism that we, for our part, wish to proceed gradually. On the contrary, it is because we have faith in African unity, because we regard it as a precious possession, because we share the great hopes placed in our work for its success, that we wish to avoid haste and the errors which often lead to disappointment and finally to despair.

If we can avoid these dangers, the African union of countries may provide an original solution to the problem of "unity in diversity".

At a single stroke, our efforts towards well-being and progress will be accelerated, and our collective work in defence of peace throughout the world will be strengthened.

These are the great tasks which await us.

The Tunisian delegation approaches them with a firm will to succeed.