



58th Anniversary Celebration of African Liberation Day / Africa Day and the Creation of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) May 25th 1963 – 2011

The Creation of the OAU

By Makonnen Ketema

In May 1963, thirty-two independent African States, who had genuine hopes and visions for the continent of Africa, came together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to create the Organization of African Unity (OAU). I had the privilege of hearing a detailed account of the staging of the 1963 Addis Ababa Summit Conference, and the reason as to why the Ethiopian capital became the site of the OAU headquarters, from a man who was once described by the international media as being closer than any other to the staging of the creation of the OAU. The man was none other than my father, the late Ketema Yifru, who was the Ethiopian Foreign Minister (1961-1971) at the time. Ketema Yifru was also recognized by the media as having played a prominent role in the creation of Africa's regional organization.

Based on the discussions I had with my father as well as his taped and written interviews, I now clearly understand what he meant when he said, "Only a few are aware of the hard work and all the effort that brought about the creation of the OAU." Most of the public is not aware of the shuttle diplomacy, the closed door negotiations, and all the tireless effort, in general, that paved the way to creating the OAU. In addition, the majority of the public is not aware of the fierce diplomatic battle that was fought by a number of states to have the OAU headquartered in their respective capital cities.



Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru with Emperor Haile Selassie

After I spoke to many people and read through a number of books that have been written on this subject, it dawned on me that many are not privy to the details behind the formation of Africa's regional organization. It seems that other than a handful of people, the majority are not aware of the OAU's history and its formation. It is my hope that once this article reaches the public, it will give the readers

an opportunity to understand the history behind the creation of the OAU. The article that you are about to read is solely based on the former Ethiopian Foreign Minister, the late Ketema Yifru's account on how the OAU was formed. The BBC's Focus on Africa Report describing Ketema Yifru's role in the creation of the OAU, stated that he was probably closer than any other to the staging of the 1963 Addis Ababa Summit Conference, which paved the way to the creation of the OAU.

Ketema Yifru was promoted to the rank of Foreign Minister in 1961 - a period in which the rift between the Monrovia and Casablanca Groups seemed to have caused a permanent division in the continent. Ketema Yifru was an active participant in all the meetings and negotiations that led to the creation of the OAU. He also played a leading role in the August 1963 Dakar Foreign Ministers Conference, where the question regarding the location of the OAU's headquarters was once and for all resolved. This article will give the reader a bird's eye view of the events that led to the creation of the OAU. In addition, it will also put to rest the unfounded speculation of the reason as to why the Ethiopian capital was chosen to house the headquarters of Africa's regional organization.

Introduction



President Kwame Nkrumah

In order to strengthen the continent of Africa and to make it less vulnerable to outside influence, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana strongly believed that the continent should be united. Thus, in the late 1950s, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah started a movement, which stressed the immediate unity of the African continent.

When Dr. Kwame Nkrumah introduced the concept of African Unity to the continent, a division, which was based on the implementation of this new concept, was created at the onset. On one hand there were those countries which believed in the immediate unity of Africa. These countries were originally

Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. Later on Egypt, the Transitional Government of Algeria, and Morocco, joined the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union to form the Casablanca Group. On the other hand, the twenty-four member Monrovia Group, otherwise known as the Conservatives, which included Nigeria, Liberia, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Togo, and many others believed in a much more gradual approach to the question of African Unity. Many believed that the rift between the two groups would become permanent and thus ending the hopes and dreams of African Unity.



Presidents Modibo Keita of Mali, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Seku Toure of Guinea (1960)

Yet, in May 1963, these two opposing groups were able to come together to form the Organization of African Unity. Many had speculated as to how such opposing groups would merge to form the OAU. Some have suggested that all the independent states that came together in Addis Ababa, did so because of the great respect they had for Emperor Haile Selassie. Others have managed to feed the public, through various mediums, with similar unfounded stories as to how the OAU was formed. Even those who have genuine interest in telling the story have not been successful in their endeavors, because it is impossible to tell the story of the creation of the OAU with just a paragraph or two.

Ethiopia and the Two Opposing Groups

The story begins in the early 1960s, when most of the independent African states had pledged an allegiance to either the Monrovia or the Casablanca Group. According to the then young Foreign Minister, Ato Ketema Yifru, his office received invitations from the two groups in January 1962.



Ketema Yifru with President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya

Ketema Yifru began his tenure as Foreign Minister (1961-1971) by concentrating his efforts to bring Ethiopia in line with mainstream Africa. His experience in the USA (early fifties) and most importantly the way in which his country was abandoned by the League of Nations, during its hour of need, had made Ketema Yifru an avowed Panafricanist. The Foreign Minister strongly believed that his country's true allies were his fellow African brothers and sisters. They say African freedom fighters, like Nkrumah, wept when they heard news of the 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, the country that was the beacon of hope for the rest of the continent. For Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, the invitation from the two groups would ultimately bring his panafricanist agenda to the forefront. The Foreign Minister was now able to present his Panafricanist Foreign Policy to the Emperor.



Emperor Haile Selassie with Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru

In Emperor Haile Selassie's office, Ketema Yifru began to present his case to the Emperor in a manner which could draw his attention. He reminded the Emperor of 1935, the year in which Ethiopia, a full member of the League of Nations, was abandoned by the same organization that was created to protect its members from external aggression. He advised the Emperor that a preventive measure should be taken to protect Ethiopia's future interest. Ketema Yifru explained that his country's national interest could be better served if it aligned itself with its fellow African countries. He advised the Emperor to embrace his African identity and become a willing participant in the continent's upcoming political affairs.

Conference On Ethiopian Foreign Policy

The discussion between the Emperor and his Foreign Minister led to a conference, chaired by Emperor Haile Selassie, of the most powerful and influential officials of the country. The question that was put forth in this conference was whether Ethiopia should pursue the new foreign policy that was proposed by the Foreign Minister, and thus become an active participant in the quest for a united Africa. The majority of the participants, who were conservative aristocrats, believed that it was in the best interest of the country to continue with its present course. In short, the majority of the participants were comfortable with the limited role that their country was playing in the African political arena. However, just when the prospect of Ethiopian involvement regarding African Unity looked bleak, the Emperor gave his approval to Ketema Yifru. In fact, the Foreign Minister was given full autonomy on this subject and was only required to report on his progress.

Accepting One Of The Invitations

It was now time to address the inevitable problem that the Ethiopian government was facing. Since Ethiopia had received invitations from the two blocs, it was now time to choose whether to attend the Monrovia or the Casablanca Conference. Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru had to make a choice and present his decision to the Emperor. In the Emperor's office, the Foreign Minister informed both the Emperor and Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold of the events that had taken place so far.



Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold, and Emperor Haile Selassie

The Foreign Minister informed the two that it would be in the best interest of his country and the cause for unity to accept the invitation from the Monrovia Group. The logic behind Ketema Yifru's thinking was that the Monrovia Group had now outnumbered the Casablanca Group twenty-two to six. If Ethiopia had aligned itself with the Casablanca Group, it would only help in widening the ever so growing rift between the two groups. In short, Ketema Yifru's decision was based on a pragmatic approach rather than an ideological stand. The Emperor agreed with his Foreign Minister's solution. Since the Emperor

could not leave the country due to his wife's illness, he instructed his Foreign Minister to represent his country at the Monrovia Summit Conference, which was to be held in January 1962, in Lagos, Nigeria.

The Monrovia Summit Conference

In Lagos, Nigeria, the core members of the Monrovia Group stepped up the attack on the Casablanca Group. Speakers like Azikiwe of Nigeria would condemn the rival group on various issues, including its failure to condemn interference in the internal affairs of member states. In his speech, Governor-General Azikiwe publicly acknowledged the obvious split between his group and the Casablanca Bloc. It was during this historic moment that the Ethiopian Foreign Minister began to lobby the conference participants in the hopes of having the next Monrovia meeting in the Ethiopian capital. Ketema Yifru, who was on a mission to bring these two groups together, believed that once he had the approval of the Monrovia Powers, he would work on having the Casablanca members attend the proposed Addis Ababa Summit Conference. The relentless effort of Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru paid off: All the Monrovia Summit participants accepted Ketema Yifru's proposal of having the next Monrovia meeting in Addis Ababa.

Now that the leaders had graciously accepted his proposal, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister sent a telegram to the Emperor informing him that it was imperative that he attend at least a day of the of the conference, for the sole purpose of identifying himself with the conference participants. The Emperor, a man whom Ketema Yifru believed was flexible, agreed to join his Foreign Minister in Lagos, Nigeria. Upon his arrival, Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru briefed the Emperor on certain issues, including the proposal he had made to hold the next Monrovia meeting in Addis Ababa. Again, the Emperor consented to the Foreign Minister's proposal.

In his speech addressed to the conference, Emperor Haile Selassie launched Ethiopia's diplomatic effort by stating that the gulf between the Monrovia and the Casablanca Group was not as wide as it seemed. The Foreign Minister had advised the Emperor to include these words in his speech because he believed that the Ethiopian government could create a possible peacemaking role for itself in the near future. At a time where others had publicly declared their alliance to either the Monrovia or the Casablanca Bloc, the Ethiopian government was now openly declaring its neutrality. The summit would end with all the participants agreeing with acclamation to have the next Monrovia bloc meeting in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia And Guinea

In the mean time, the Casablanca group had scheduled a conference in Egypt for June 1962. Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, who at this point was trying to bridge the gap between the opposing groups, formulated a plan that could solve this problem. Since he had very good relations with the Guinean government, including President Seku Toure, who was one of the leaders of the Casablanca group, he decided that it would be in the best interest of his country if the Ethiopian government held talks with the government of Guinea.

The Foreign Minister approached the Emperor with his plan of extending an invitation to President Seku Toure for a state visit to Ethiopia. When the Emperor asked why he had come up with this plan, the

Foreign Minister explained that the goal of the Ethiopian government is to bring the opposing groups together. Ketema Yifru argued that President Seku Toure could help the Ethiopian government achieve its goal. The Foreign Minister explained that inviting President Seku Toure to Ethiopia could create an opportunity to exchange views on the division that existed between the two blocs. The Emperor agreed, and as result a special invitation was sent to President Seku Ture, who was attending the Casablanca Group conference in Cairo, Egypt. The Guinean President accepted the invitation and joined the Emperor and his Foreign Minister on June 28, 1962, in Asmara, where the Emperor was attending a ceremony for the Naval Academy graduation.



The governments of Guinea and Ethiopia

In Asmara, Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, who had forged a close friendship with President Seku Ture and other members of his government, had an opportunity to present his case to the Guinean delegation. Ketema Yifru pointed out that the conflicting views of the Monrovia and the Casablanca Group could create a permanent division in the continent. He advised the Guinean delegation that it was in the best interest of both governments to stop such a drastic occurrence from taking place. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister pleaded his case based on his friendship and the close ties that he had forged with the Guinean government. To the Foreign Minister's delight, after some convincing, the Guinean delegation agreed to help in bringing the two groups together. President Seku Ture would later reaffirm his governments position during his talks with Emperor Haile Selassie.

The dye had been cast. It was agreed by both governments that the May 1963 Addis Ababa Summit Conference, which was initially set for the Monrovia Group, will now be a Summit Conference of all the independent African States. Following the agreement, a communiqué that both heads of states had agreed to hold an all out African Summit in Addis Ababa was issued. The reason that was given for this sudden move was that both governments believed the gap between the two blocs was dramatically increasing. Therefore, in order to protect the continent from falling into harms way, the governments of Ethiopia and Guinea had decided to call an all out African Summit Conference in Addis Ababa, in hopes of resolving the difference that existed between the Casablanca and the Monrovia Groups.

Ethiopian Foreign Minister Tours African Capitals

Now that an agreement was signed between the two countries, the next step was to convince both the Monrovia and the Casablanca blocs to attend the proposed Summit Conference in Addis Ababa. It was decided that the Ethiopian government, in the person of Ketema Yifru, would lobby both groups, while the Guinean government, in the person of Mr. Diallo Telli, who became the first Secretary General of the OAU, would lobby the Casablanca Group members. It is important to note that by now the Ethiopian Foreign Minister was given full autonomy on this matter. The Emperor, who had envisioned himself as being the key player of such a diplomatic event, would give free reign to his young Foreign Minister.



Ketema Yifru with his friend, Mr. Diallo Telli, who was the first Secretary General of the OAU

Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru embarked on a long journey across Africa with the Emperor's letter of invitation, which were written by him and his staff. Ketema Yifru traveled through various African capitals for nearly two weeks in an effort to exchange views on certain issues with the leaders, including the possibility of preparing an agenda for the Summit. In general, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister's trip around the continent was geared to making arrangements for an African Summit Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru made sure that he received an answer from each head of state before leaving each country. In fact, according to other sources, the Foreign Minister was determined to make the Summit a success. One of the tactics he used to have the leaders accept the letter of invitation was to make it appear as if he would not be permitted to enter Ethiopia if the leaders did not accept the invitation to attend the Conference.

President Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), President Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa (Nigeria), HIM King Hassan II (Morocco), and President Julius Nyerere (Tanzania) were some of the leaders whom Ketema Yifru met during his long trip across Africa.

In Egypt, President Nasser would give him his acceptance letter the very day that he received the invitation. From Egypt, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister traveled to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and then to West, Central and Eastern Africa. All in all, the thirty-two independent African States accepted the invitation. According to the agreement, in May 1963, an African Summit Conference, which included all the thirty-two independent states, would be held in the Ethiopian capital. The leaders agreed that the summit would begin with a Foreign Ministers Conference to iron out various issues, including the drafting of a charter.

The 1963 Addis Ababa Summit Conference

The Conference of Foreign Ministers of the African States opened, on May 15, 1963, with Ketema Yifru being elected chairman and Dr. Tesfaye Gebre-Ezgy, the Ethiopian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, elected as Provisionary Secretary General. The task of the African Ministers was to create a charter, which could become the cornerstone of a future organization.

Some of the governments that were represented in Addis Ababa had different views on what the charter should consist of. Among them, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria had drawn up charters, which could possibly become the basis for discussion. While the charter of Ghana represented the views of the Casablanca group and the Nigerian charter represented the position of the Monrovia bloc, the Ethiopian draft charter embodied the views of both groups. As a result, the Ethiopian draft charter was chosen to become the basis for discussion.

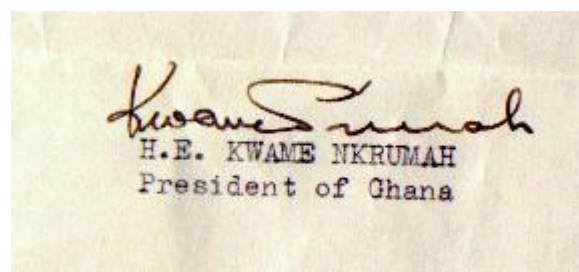
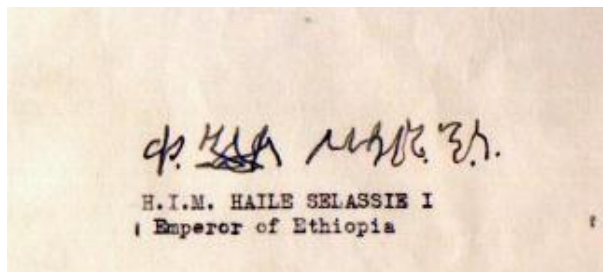
Ethiopia's draft agenda consisted of the following:

- The establishment of an Organization of African States, with a charter and a permanent secretariat.
- Cooperation in areas of economy and social welfare, education and culture, and collective defense.
- The final eradication of colonialism.
- Means of combating racial discrimination and apartheid.
- Possible establishment of regional economic groupings and,
- Disarmament.

Before a consensus could be reached on adapting a charter, the Heads of States Conference was convened on May 22, 1963. In the middle of their conference, the heads of states summoned Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, who was the chairman of the Foreign Ministers conference, and ordered him to convene a Foreign Ministers conference for the purpose of creating a charter that could be signed by the heads of states before the Summit was adjourned. Armed with this mandate, Ketema Yifru convened a Foreign Ministers meeting once again. The African Ministers worked from 11:00 PM at night until 3:00 AM in the morning, to finally come up with a charter that could be signed by the African leaders.

Ketema Yifru presented the charter to the Heads of States by saying, "...I wish to repeat that all the documents before you were worked out by long discussions and compromise. All our meetings were conducted in a spirit of brotherhood and there was complete agreement on all decisions. If there were differences, these were limited to questions of procedure, approach of tactic, but never on substance or the destiny of our peoples. It is therefore my bounden duty to express my appreciation for the wisdom of the Foreign Ministers and to ask this august body, in the name of all our peoples, to adopt these measures formally and to sign your name in history. As his Imperial Majesty remarked at the outset of the conference, if we fail, surely history will never forgive us, for it shall not give us another occasion. Thank you very much."

After some discussion and deliberations, thirty-two African Heads of States (Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso (formerly known as Upper Volta), Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Leopoldville, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, and Uganda) signed the OAU charter in Addis Ababa, on May 25, 1963. Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, in recognition of all his efforts and personal commitment to the process, was presented with a document signed by all the thirty-two Heads of States. Part of the document, showing the pictures of the African leaders, is shown in the Home Page of this website.



Shown here is part of the autographed section of the document that was presented to Ketema Yifru by the African Heads of State

When asked about the atmosphere of the conference, Ketema Yifru remembered the euphoria of Pan-Africanism, which flourished in the hall that May. He also remembered the brilliant speeches that were made by some of the leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Seku Toure.



A Journey Filled With Obstacles



The journey that the young Foreign Minister had taken towards the creation of the OAU was one that was filled with internal political obstacles. During that time, those who had close ties to the monarchy, such as the aristocracy, dominated the Ethiopian political arena. Even though the Emperor gave people like Ketema Yifru, who came from humble backgrounds, the opportunity, there were those who opposed the idea of having a 'commoner' in a position to impact Ethiopia's foreign policy. As a result, there was a strong opposition to the new policy of Pan-Africanism, which was proposed by Ketema Yifru.

As stated earlier, the Emperor supported the new foreign policy that was championed by his Foreign Minister, and its progress so far. Therefore, those who were opposed to the policy did not have a lot of opportunity to voice their opposition. As a result, they decided to focus their attention on that famous speech which was delivered by Emperor Haile Selassie, in May 1963. In that speech, the Emperor had said, "This Conference cannot close without adopting a single charter. We cannot leave here without having created a single African organization possessed of the attributes We have described. If We fail in this, we will have shirked our responsibility to Africa and to the people we lead. If we succeed, then, and only then, will we have justified our presence here." It was, in fact, the Foreign Minister who had added this statement to the Emperor's speech.

Those who were against Ethiopia's involvement in the creation of the OAU had convinced the Emperor that he had made a blunder. The Emperor was convinced that he should not have delivered what was then a powerful speech. The Emperor was advised that his Foreign Minister had intentionally created a situation where the Emperor could perhaps lose credibility around the world if the conference failed to accomplish what he had envisioned. This would mean that Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru's plea to sign a charter and creating an organization would be seen as a mistake.

Once again the Foreign Minister was summoned to the Emperor's office. There, the Emperor asked whether his Foreign Minister was intentionally trying to make him look bad. A surprised Foreign Minister reminded the Emperor that His Majesty had thoroughly examined the contents of the speech. Most importantly, he explained that the statement in question could not bring about an adverse effect. In

fact, Ketema Yifru explained that, quite to the contrary, the statement could bring about a favorable review of His Majesty, years from now, when historians look back on this date. Ketema Yifru continued by assuring the Emperor that those historians would say, "Emperor Haile Selassie, who was thinking ahead of his time, had tried to set up an African organization, but unfortunately his idea was turned down by his colleagues." The Minister explained that if the Summit did not succeed, it would not be Emperor Haile Selassie who would be blamed but the rest of the leaders who failed to take the initiative.

In Search of a Headquarters

Now that the charter was signed, finding a headquarters for this newly created organization was next on the list. Many of the participants of the Addis Ababa summit, as we will find out later, had their own beliefs as to which capital should house the headquarters of the OAU. Among them, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, who had worked ever so hard to bridge the gap between the Monrovia and the Casablanca blocs, strongly believed that his capital should be crowned to seat the OAU headquarters.

In a meeting with Emperor Haile Selassie and Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold, the Foreign Minister was able to disclose his thoughts regarding the OAU headquarters. Ketema Yifru explained that their struggle would be in vain if the OAU headquarters did not end up being in the Ethiopian capital. Both the Emperor and the Prime Minister would find out that the young Foreign Minister had already come up with a plan. He explained that three delegations should be created for the purpose of traveling around the continent to thank the various governments for graciously accepting the May invitation and for being instrumental in making the Summit a success. Most importantly, the delegations would lobby to have as many African nations support the idea of having the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Ketema Yifru had a reason as to why he chose to have three delegations. After closely working in the system for some time, the Foreign Minister understood that it would have been seen in a different light if he had suggested to have one delegation, which would be led by him alone. Some could perceive this as an opportunity for the Foreign Minister to seek personal fame. Thus, in order not to jeopardize his work, Ketema Yifru included the names of two other high-ranking officials for the purpose of leading the other two delegations. Regardless of his efforts, both the Emperor and the Prime Minister turned down his proposal.

The Emperor's decision would ultimately jeopardize any hopes of having the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa. A week before the Dakar Foreign Ministers Conference (August 1963), fifteen Francophone States, which met in Benin, would voice their desire to have the OAU headquarters in Dakar, Senegal. The decision of the Francophone countries dealt a blow to any plans of having the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa or any other capital city for that matter. With the odds stacked against it, will the Ethiopian government pursue any plans of having the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa?



Ketema Yifru, Diallo Telli, and Emperor Haile Selassie

Once the news of the Francophone countries reached Addis Ababa, a distressed Emperor summoned his Foreign Minister to his office. When asked what he thought of the news, the Foreign Minister informed the Emperor and Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold that it would be very difficult to find a solution to the problem. Ketema Yifru, who was known to be one of the few outspoken members of the government, reminded the Emperor of his earlier suggestion to act fast before the euphoria of the Addis Ababa Summit became a thing of the past. A persistent Emperor, however, inquired as to what steps should be taken to remedy the problem. The Foreign Minister offered to go to the Dakar Conference and then, depending on the atmosphere, would play it by ear.

At this point in time, it is important to note that the Foreign Minister was the only one in the government who was present in all the meetings and the negotiations that led to the creation of the OAU. The Foreign Minister had also established important connections with the continent's leading policy makers, including all of the Foreign Ministers. As a result, both the Emperor and the Prime Minister were willing to give him back the free rein that he had in the beginning.

The Dakar Foreign Ministers Conference

Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru arrived in Senegal with his eight member delegation. The task at hand was to convince as many members as possible to favor Addis Ababa over the proposed capital cities. Ketema Yifru started off by assigning four countries to each member of his delegation. Delegation members were to approach representatives of the countries that he/she were assigned to in hopes of convincing them to support Addis Ababa. Unfortunately for the Minister, as the head of the delegation, he was left with the burden of lobbying all the conference participants.

As soon as the conference was underway, the delegates of Senegal and Nigeria argued that the question concerning the OAU headquarters should be settled immediately. The unexpected move of the delegates from Senegal and Nigeria created a dilemma for the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, who at this point in time had not gained enough support for his country. If the motion set by Senegal and Nigeria was permitted to pass, his country's hopes for being a possible site for the OAU headquarters will definitely be put in jeopardy. On the other hand, if Ketema Yifru argued against the motion, it would

seem as if he was not prepared for this particular issue. After carefully weighing both sides of the issue, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister decided to go ahead with the proposal that was made by Senegal and Nigeria.

The political committee started out by electing Benin's Foreign Minister, Emile Zinsou, as its chairman. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister described Mr. Zinsou as being an honest and fair person. As soon as the chairman brought up the matter concerning the headquarters, the Foreign Minister of Senegal, Mr. Doudou Thiam, began by offering his capital, Dakar. The Nigerians and Zaire followed by offering their capital cities for possible sites for the OAU headquarters. Ethiopia, who at this time had struck a deal with the Guinean delegation, had the Guinean delegation in the person of Ishmael Toure, nominate Addis Ababa for the site of the OAU headquarters.

The Ethiopian Foreign Minister had approached the Guineans with an offer that they could not refuse. The plan was that if Guinea supported Addis Ababa, then Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru will not only nominate Mr. Diallo Telli, Guinea's Permanent Representative to the UN, for the post of the OAU Secretary General, but he would also fight to get him elected to that post. Later on, Mr. Diallo Telli was elected to head the Organization of African Unity.

Ishmael Toure, the brother of President Seku Toure, gave a lengthy speech where he reminded the delegates that Ethiopia had been the beacon of hope for those African nations that were struggling under colonialism. Mr. Toure finished his speech by urging the delegates to have the OAU headquarters in the historical capital of Addis Ababa. In addition to Mr. Toure, the close friendship that Ketema Yifru had developed over the years, with various members of the conference, would ultimately pay off. Speaker after speaker, a list that included the Tanzanian Minister of Justice, the Sudanese Foreign Minister, Foreign Minister Dr. Karefa Smart of Sierra Leon, and the Algerian Foreign Minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, would all support the idea of having the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa.

After hearing the various arguments that were presented to it, the conference asked the delegates of Senegal, Nigeria, Zaire, and Ethiopia to further discuss the matter among themselves in hopes that the four nations could agree on a capital city. However, since all of the four nations were determined to have the OAU headquarters in their respective capitals, an agreement could not be reached regarding this matter.

The ever so determined representatives of Nigeria and Senegal, Mr. Jaja Wachuku and Mr. Doudou Thiam, came up with another proposal. The proposal included a fact-finding mission that would determine which capital was better equipped to house the OAU headquarters. Obviously, this was a last minute attempt by both Senegal and Nigeria, who were now startled by the growing numbers of Ketema Yifru's supporters, to gain more support for their respective capital cities.

The Ethiopian Foreign Minister, with the help of his supporters, was successful in defeating the proposal that was advanced by Senegal and Nigeria. Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru was against the plan that was advanced by the two nations, because he believed that such a move would prolong the panafricanist dream from being realized. Further more, he believed that the African nations should show the world

that they were indeed serious. For outside onlookers, Ketema Yifru believed that it would indeed seem callous to form an organization and yet purposefully prolong the matter concerning its headquarters.

At the strong urging of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister and his supporters, the committee agreed on having the matter resolved immediately. It was decided that there would be a secret ballot. The city that gets the most votes would be recommended to the plenary meeting, which was composed of both the political and the economic and social committees. At the conclusion of the votes, Ketema Yifru, who was carefully analyzing the facial expression of Acting Secretary General Tesfaye Gebre-Ezgy, who happened to be a close and personal friend of the Foreign Minister, understood that his city had won. Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru then turned to his delegation and informed them that they had made it.

As soon as the chairman announced the winner, Ketema Yifru became curious to find out the breakdown of the votes. When he approached his friend Dr. Tesfaye Gebre-Ezgy, the Foreign Minister found out that his country had defeated Senegal with a very slim margin. While Ethiopia had managed to gain sixteen votes, Senegal had managed to lock in thirteen votes. Nigeria and Zaire would follow with one vote each.

Ketema Yifru Meets With The Francophone Ministers

Now that Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru was aware that he had won with the slimmest margin possible, he devised a plan that would insure a lasting victory for his country. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister invited the Ministers of the Francophone states, who had openly supported Senegal a week earlier, to a meeting that would take place later on that day. This critical meeting would take place before the plenary session, which was to determine, once and for all, the question surrounding the headquarters of the OAU.

As scheduled, the Francophone Ministers met with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister at 10:00 pm in the evening. In the meeting, Ketema Yifru reminded the group that Ethiopians had, on various occasions, sided with them on a number of issues. For instance, he reminded them that his country had come to the Monrovia meeting to support their conference. Ketema Yifru also pointed out that it was indeed the Ethiopians who had bridged the gap between their block and the Casablanca group. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister went to stress the fact that Ethiopians had struggled with their fellow Africans to make this possible. The Minister informed them that he strongly believed that Addis Ababa would ultimately be chosen over the other four cities. Therefore, he suggested that it would be in the panafricanist spirit to make this a unanimous vote. After some more convincing, from those gathered there that night, eight decided to vote for Addis Ababa. The Foreign Minister remembered Cameroon as being one of the key supporters that he got that day.



The May 1963 Addis Ababa Summit Conference

Once he got the support of some of the Francophone states, the Foreign Minister mapped out his strategy. It would be paramount for all his supporters to be present at the plenary meeting. In order to win, Ketema Yifru acknowledged that he had to get at least seventeen votes out of the thirty-two. As it was stated earlier, Ketema Yifru had sixteen votes coming out of the political committee.

In the plenary meeting, the political committee, as expected, recommended Addis Ababa for the site of the OAU headquarters. At this point in time, it was suggested that a final vote should be taken in order to settle the question regarding the OAU headquarters. Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru argued that they should have a roll call rather than having a secret ballot. By having a roll call, not only would the Ethiopian Foreign Minister apply pressure on those who promised him their support, but he would also have the benefit of knowing whom he could count on in the future.

An Unlikely Ally

Prior to the vote in the plenary session, a delegate, whom Ketema Yifru least expected, informed him that he would support Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister would never forget the conversation that he had with the Foreign Minister of Somalia, Abdillahi Issa. Foreign Minister Issa had asked his Ethiopian counterpart if they could have lunch together that day to discuss an important issue.

Mr. Issa, who was described by Ketema Yifru as being a gentleman, had received a telegram from his government. It was in the restaurant that Mr. Issa disclosed the contents of the telegram to his Ethiopian counterpart. The telegram stated that under no circumstances should Mr. Issa support Addis Ababa in the plenary session. The Somali Foreign Minister surprised Ketema Yifru by informing him that he would vote for Addis Ababa regardless of the order that he had just received. Although the two had known each other in the early 1950s, when Ketema Yifru interviewed Mr. Issa, who was then the chairman of the Somalia Youth League, for his thesis, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister was both moved and surprised by the Foreign Minister's gesture. The Foreign Minister of Somalia had opted to publicly support Addis Ababa. When Ketema Yifru argued to have a roll call, it would be known that people like Mr. Issa had supported Addis Ababa.

Roll Call

Algeria began the vote with a simple yes. The delegate of Burundi, who had now determined that the votes for Kinshasa had dwindled, opted to support Addis Ababa. Next on the list was Cameroon, whom the Minister was eagerly awaiting for. Cameroon's decisive vote would go for Addis Ababa. In addition to these votes, all the eight Francophone countries kept their promise and voted for Addis Ababa. The Ethiopians had now managed to master twenty-eight out of the thirty-two available votes. The African Ministers had unanimously elected Addis Ababa for the site of their newly formed organization. As for the rest of the votes, while Nigeria and Senegal refused to participate, one would abstain, and Madagascar would mistakenly vote against Addis Ababa. Regardless, Addis Ababa had won with a huge majority of the votes. As soon as the voting was over, Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru sent a telex to the Emperor, informing him of this promising news.

The Significance Of the Addis Ababa Summit for Ethiopia



A meeting of Leaders from East and Central Africa

Gwendolyn Carter in her book titled, "National Unity and Regionalism in Eight African States," which was published in 1966, reflecting on the Ethiopian contribution to the creation of the OAU wrote, "What Nasser or Nkrumah or the Casablanca or Monrovia or Brazzaville grouping could not do, Haile Selassie accomplished with little difficulty." Gwendolyn Carter referring to the significance of the conference in relations to Ethiopia adds, "Ethiopia committed itself to Africa, thus completing the termination of its traditional isolation; contacts with Africa had come only after increased contact with the Middle East, Europe, the United States, and Asia." Most importantly, the author brought to light the most significant impact that the creation of the OAU had on Ethiopian affairs during that period; "The Ethiopian government has become an important spokesman for Africa not only in the United Nations, but also in diplomatic exchanges with the United States and other countries."

Final Thoughts

The creation of the Organization of African Unity was indeed a significant historic moment for the continent of Africa, especially in an era where a number of African countries were still under colonial rule. Once the OAU was set up, Africans were able to come together under the umbrella of their newly formed organization. With a concerted voice, the African continent was now able to fight the evil forces of colonialism. Through the OAU's liberation committee and the United Nations, Africans were able to work collectively to bring about an end to colonialism. The plight of the African people that was once dismissed by many was now heard by the entire world. Indeed, Pan-Africanism, which was the driving force of the continent in the 1960s, had proved the point that every obstacle that Africa was faced with could be solved through the unity of its people.

In the early years of its creation, the OAU was able to conduct its own successful brand of conflict resolution. The Ethio-Somalia conflicts, the Kenya-Somalia conflict, and the Algeria-Morocco conflict are examples of how the OAU was able to divert potential wars by peaceful means. At that time, it seemed that Africans had come to a point where they had mastered the art of solving their own problems with their own brand of solutions. A conflict in the continent, wherever its location maybe, was never left untouched. The Panafricanist atmosphere of the 1960s had brought with it an understanding that any conflict in Africa, regardless of its geographical location, was an African problem. It was with this positive outlook that our leaders were able to successfully solve conflicts, which now seem to be unsolvable.

Now, however, all that has changed. The flames of Pan-Africanism that once burnt bright in the hearts of many, seem to have died out. Pan-Africanism that was the driving force for the success of the OAU, in its early years, is now a thing of the past. It has now come to a point where there seems to be no end to the various conflicts and problems that have plagued the African continent for many years. Slowly but surely, Africa seems to be disappearing from the international forum.

One wonders if the OAU should play a leadership role in creating a forum where Africans could genuinely search for solutions to the problems that they are facing today. There are some, however, who strongly believe that the OAU has become ineffective. They say we should dismantle the organization and come up with a different one. It seems that it has become customary in Africa, to tear down what others have built through hard work. Would it not be more logical to build on what we have rather than destroying it for the purpose of starting from scratch? For instance, we could talk about amending the OAU Charter, which was meant for a different time and era. "Non-Interference in the Internal Affairs of Member States" is one part of the charter that has to be revised. In the sixties, the Non-Interference clause was included in the charter to appease those states, which strongly believed that the government of Ghana was involved in both the death of Togo's President, Mr. Sylvanus Olympio, and the change in government that soon followed. The None-Interference clause has served its purpose in 1963, because without it many states perhaps might have refused to sign the Charter of the Organization of African Unity.

Today, being a different time and era, it seems the people of Africa want the OAU to interfere in the internal affairs of their countries. There is a consensus among Africans that the OAU should interfere in

countries where there is gross human rights violations, civil wars, and other major catastrophes to name a few. We have to understand that nothing is written in stone. The founding fathers themselves, had included Article XXX111 in the Charter, fully aware that there might be a need for change in the future. Article XXX111 reads, "This Charter may be amended or revised if any Member State makes a written request to the Administrative Secretary-General to the effect; provided that the proposed amendment is not submitted to the Assembly until all the Members States have been duly notified of it and a period of one year has elapsed. Such amendments shall not be effective unless approved by at least two-thirds of all Member States."

If the people see it fit, those who are in charge should make the necessary changes to give the people what their hearts desire. For example, the great Constitution, which all Americans are proud of, was originally different from the one we see today. As times have changed, so have the needs and priorities of the American people. As a result, through the years, American lawmakers have made a number of amendments to their constitution, so that it could better handle the ever so changing priorities of the American people.

Even though the OAU is located in a continent, which has very few resources, I believe that if our governments are willing to make the appropriate changes, the OAU might rise to the occasion and become a leader in finding solutions to the problems that we are faced with today.

This article is dedicated to the Founding Fathers of the OAU and to the late Ato Ketema Yifru and his former colleagues, who, through brotherhood and cooperation, made it possible for Africa to have a voice in the international forum during the 1960s.



Speech made by H.E. Ato Ketema Yifru at the Pan-African Freedom Movement For East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECA) Conference. Addis Ababa, February 2 - 10, 1962

The speech you are about to read brings into perspective the dedicated and laborious efforts of Africans, in the 1960s, to rid the continent from the grips of colonialism.

Speech made by H.E. Ato Ketema Yifru at the Pan-African Freedom Movement For East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECA) Conference. Addis Ababa, February 2 - 10, 1962.

Distinguished Delegates, Freedom Fighters , Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express my most sincere and warm gratitude for the honor with which you have accorded me by unanimously electing me to preside over this important Conference of the Pan African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa. I take my election to the Chairmanship of this Conference as a spontaneous expression of goodwill and brotherhood on your part to my August Sovereign, Emperor Haile Selassie I, the Ethiopian Government and people.

We are here seized with the task of accomplishing two basic objectives, which are of the highest importance to Africa today. One is to jointly pledge to do everything on our part from within and outside Africa to speed up the total emancipation of our Continent. The other is to discuss and to set up the necessary machinery that would lay down the necessary frameworks for our proposed union of the East and Central African Countries.

While we receive with great satisfaction and relief the recent accession to independence of many African countries and are anxiously awaiting the independence of few others more shortly, it grieves us to see that a large part of our continent still finds itself under the yoke of colonial rule. Although with some reservation we note that in some of the African colonies the developments that are taking place today are very promising, we are confronted with serious problems with respect to the deplorable situations prevailing in Southern and Northern Rhodesia, in the Portuguese Colonies, in Southwest Africa and South Africa.

Since its inception and throughout its operation the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyassaland has been opposed by the dominant and rightful majority of the population of the component territories of the Federation. Against the fierce and relentless African opposition the Federation was established, with the sanction of the British Government, with the sole aim of perpetuating the political and economic dominance of a handful white minority numbering approximately 300,000 over an African majority of over 8,000,000 inhabitants.

The Federation is in theory said to be a multi-racial partnership. But in practice the Federal Government consists entirely of a minority of European settlers whose policy so far has been to suppress African political activities and aspirations for freedom and justice and to deny them from exercising their political, constitutional, economic, and social rights.

The component territories of the Federation are still considered to preserve their protectorate status; but unfortunately Great Britain has so far never taken any step to exercise its protectorate powers over

Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland and its reserved powers over Southern Rhodesia to protect Africans from the ruthless administration of the defunct Federation. Great Britain, which so often boasts of being the exponent of parliamentary democracy, has failed to apply to Northern and Southern Rhodesia the policy it had followed with respect to its former colonies in West Africa. However, as the saying goes "better late than never", Great Britain has still great opportunities and powers to rectify its failures in the past and to meet squarely African demands for full self-government and independence.

The situation in the Portuguese African Colonies is another serious problem, which requires our urgent consideration. All peaceful means of meeting African legitimate aspirations have been frustrated. Portugal continues to maintain the absurd position that our African brothers are Portuguese citizens. Evidently this is only a screen behind which Portugal seeks to continue its policy of exploitation, brutal practice of racial discrimination and forced labor, and systematic extermination of unarmed Africans. The situation is thus of utmost acuteness.

The injustice prevailing in the Mandated territory of Southwest Africa under South Africa's ruthless administration and notorious policy of apartheid has surpassed all the endurance and patience of the African inhabitants of the territory and of all mankind. All efforts to persuade South Africa to abide by its obligations under the Mandate have been exhausted to no avail. All that is left now for us Africans is to meet South Africa in a united front both from within and outside the United Nations Organization to press upon the latter to take a more positive and resolute action against South Africa in accordance with article I paragraph I of the Charter. The same approach is also equally imperative to bring to an end the unhappy condition in which our African brothers in South Africa find themselves under the deplorable apartheid policy of the racist Verwoerd Government.

The problems facing us are thus very serious and dangerously threatening. To succeed we have to muster all the material and moral forces we can possibly mobilize. We have to intensify and be vigilant in our struggle against the injustices of colonial rule and racial discrimination. At our gathering here we have a heavy task to accomplish. Approaching our problems with seriousness of purpose and determination, I am sure we will succeed in all our endeavors. The other aspect of our work deals with the question of bringing into effect the proposed union of East and Central African countries.

When in the 19th Century the Colonial Powers launched the scramble for Africa they had formed a collusion and through exchange of secret letters and various treaty agreement had prearranged the partition of Africa and laid down the conditions of acquiring recognition for their respective occupation of African territories. Likewise, today they have formed a similar collusion among themselves to advance their neocolonialist policy in order to exploit on political and economic life, impair our development programs and make us ever dependent on them for our political and economic security.

This, indeed, is the challenge that makes our unity imperative. Already the Colonial Power have left behind in the territories they have quitted chronic border, tribal, linguistic, political economic and social problems. These artificial problems were purposely engineered in order to create perennial weak points by which they could subvert, balkanize, weaken and exploit African States. If each African State were to find solution to these problems which transcend its territorial confines, it would come into conflict with

its neighboring African States and dangerously call for their disintegration let alone that it would be diverted from consolidating its independence and executing its national development programs. However, to the bitter disappointment of the Colonial Powers who follow the policy of political and economic exploitation through promoting division among African States, the very forces that were designed to divide and break us apart are now becoming the very compelling forces of our unity.

Bearing thus in mind the seriousness of the work we are here gathered to accomplish, I would like to appeal to the delegates to refrain from raising issues that would undermine the objectives of this Conference and the cause for which we have dedicated ourselves. On my part, with your cooperation and understanding, I shall conduct the proceedings of our deliberations with fairness to all and strict compliance to the agenda before us.

Speech made by H.E. Ato Ketema Yifru at the opening of the Preparatory Conference of Foreign Ministers. May 15, 1963.

Distinguished Foreign Ministers, ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply sensible to the honor you have shown to me in electing me as Chairman of this conference, and I assure you that I shall do everything possible to justify this honor and the confidence that underlies it.

We all know what it is that has brought us here together: the quest for African Unity and the search for solutions to the problems, which travail the continent today. It would be inappropriate for me, at this time, to touch in detail upon the measures which not only Ethiopia but, I think, all of us basically agree can and should be taken to these ends. The African States find themselves today, as regards the issue of African Unity, with wide areas of common agreement among them. In our work here we should concentrate on these.

Africa is facing great responsibilities and great challenges. But at the same time, never before has the opportunity been so great to reach agreement on matters of common interest and to translate these agreements into reality. The time before us is short and should not be wasted in idle discussion of matters, which will not make a real contribution to the achievement of the unity of Africa and the solutions of our problems. We have not come here in an attempt to solve all our problems, nor all the problems of the world. If we can solve even a portion of Africa's problems, this Conference and that to follow it will have been productive indeed. If we permit ourselves to become embroiled in argument on questions, which do not relate directly and specifically to the central issue of African Unity, the time at our disposal will slip past.

It is essential that in the days ahead we are guided by the fundamental principles of the cause of African Unity. We can agree on positive steps. Let us do so. Each step takes us just that much nearer our goal and makes the next step just that much easier to take. Our views are identical on many questions. Our opinions are unanimous on many matters. The areas in which African States can decide today to cooperate their activities include virtually every aspect of national and international life. If we begin from these premises and work together in good will, Africa will prove not only that ultimate union is

possible, but also that we are more than worthy of the independence which we enjoy and the increasingly important role which we are playing in world affairs.

I thank you again for the great honor, which you have bestowed on me.