



Source: Salim, 24 June 2008, New York, Photo UN7679392, Photographer Evan Schneider

SALIM, Salim Ahmed

Tanzanian diplomat and sixth Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) 1989-2001

By **Ulf Engel** · Version 24 January 2016

Was born 23 January 1942 on Unguja Island in the Sultanate of Zanzibar, now Tanzania. He was the son of Ahmed Salim Ali, writer employed by farmers, and Maryam Ali Ahmed. On 17 April 1964 he married Amne Ali Rifai. They have one daughter, two sons and an adopted daughter.

Biography

Salim was born in a hospital on Unguja Island and grew up on Pemba Island in a large Arab family that, relative to the local situation, had considerable means since his father did administrative work for an association of clove tree farmers. Before Salim was born, his parents lost their first two children (twins), which made him the eldest son. His mother died when he was five and stepmothers raised him. He was educated at Uweleni Primary School on Pemba Island (1946-1956) and then Government Boys Secondary School and King George VI Secondary School in Zanzibar Town (1957-1960). In 1960 he became a student activist as well as founder and first Vice President of the Zanzibar youth movement. At the age of 19 he was appointed Deputy Chief Representative of the Umma Party (*umma* is Kiswahili for people), a Socialist breakaway group from the conservative pro-

Sultanate Zanzibar Nationalist Party, in Havana, Cuba, where he was based from 1961 to 1962. Salim was inspired by Fidel Castro's activities after the 1959 revolution and discovered a passion for cigars. When he returned to Zanzibar he joined the forces that opposed the Sultan and the Zanzibar Nationalist Party, which also favoured independence but represented mainly the interests of the Arab minority. In 1963 Salim was named publicity secretary of the Umma Party and editor-in-chief of its daily paper, *Sauti ya Umma* (*Voice of the People*), and coordinator of the united front of opposition parties, taking on responsibility for editing its paper *Sauti ya Vyama Tisa* (*Voice of the United Front*). Between 1963 and 1964 Salim was Secretary-General of the All-Zanzibar Journalists Organization. The opposition brought about a split of the nationalist party and the Sultan and his Arab government were overthrown in January 1964. After the revolution in Zanzibar and the unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar into the United Republic of Tanzania, Salim left the field of journalism. At the age of 22 he was appointed Ambassador to Egypt (1964-1965), making him the youngest African ambassador at the time. In 1964 he attended the Cairo summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), an entity set up in 1963, as a member of the Tanzanian delegation. Salim helped the Argentine Marxist revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara visit Tanzania and meet freedom fighters. Salim invited Guevara to his house, where they discussed the Cuban revolution and the strength of liberation movements in Africa. His ambassadorship in Egypt was followed by a stint as High Commissioner to India. During his posting (1965-1968) he pursued his undergraduate studies in political science and history at the Christian constituent St. Stephen's College of the University of Delhi (1965-1967), but did not complete a degree. He was then Director of the Africa and Middle East Division in Tanzania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dar es Salaam for one year, followed by a brief post as Ambassador to the People's Republic of China in 1969.

In 1970 Salim was appointed Tanzania's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) in New York, where he served for more than a decade, and was also concurrently accredited as Tanzania's Ambassador to Cuba and Tanzania's High Commissioner to Guyana, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. He also completed a Masters degree in international affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University in January 1975. In 1971 Salim supported the efforts to recognize the People's Republic of China as the representative of China to the UN, rather than the Republic of China in Taiwan, and, when this came to pass, became known for a spontaneous dance of joy in the General Assembly. From 1972 to 1980 Salim chaired the UN Special Committee on Decolonization on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and People, better known as Committee of 24. Under his chairmanship the Committee played a key role in steering many colonies and non-self-governing territories to full sovereignty and independence. Salim earned a reputation as a staunch fighter against colonialism and apartheid, who simultaneously cooperated with Western powers. He was also a successful facilitator between Anglophone and Francophone African countries at the UN. In 1975 Salim served as Chairman of the UN Security Council's Committee on Sanctions against Rhodesia and in January 1976 he was elected as President of the Security Council for one year. In September 1979 he was elected to serve as President of the 34th Session of the General Assembly. He also presided over the General Assembly's sixth (1980) and seventh (1980-1982) Emergency Special Sessions, which dealt with, respectively, the situation following the Soviet Union's invasion in Afghanistan and the question of Palestine. He supported a Palestinian state, but also recognized Israel's legitimate rights. In September 1980 he presided over the 11th Special Session, which discussed the (little) progress made in the establishment of the so-called New International Economic Order. When China indicated the need to support candidates from the developing world and vetoed Kurt Waldheim's candidature for a third term as UN Secretary-General, the African countries proposed Salim as successor, but his candidacy was vetoed by the United States, who saw him as an African Socialist and Third World agitator.

In 1980 Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Tanzania's Socialist President between 1964 and 1985, called Salim to join the Tanzanian cabinet. Between 1980 and 1985 Salim successively served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1980-1984) and Prime Minister (1984-1985), providing important support for

constitutional reforms in Tanzania. In domestic politics he played a leading role in the Party of the Revolution (Chama Cha Mapinduzi, CCM) as he was responsible for its foreign policy. However, he failed to be nominated as the CCM successor candidate to President Nyerere when he faced off (as 'Salim a Zanzibari') against rivals Rashidi Kawawa and reformer Ali Hassan Mwinyi (who became the new president in 1985). As the constitution did not allow both the president and the prime minister to come from Zanzibar, Salim was demoted to Deputy Prime Minister and also appointed Minister of Defence and National Service. He held both offices from 1986 to 1989. As Deputy Prime Minister Salim promoted efforts to rebuild the country's economy, which had suffered from several African Socialist experiments, negotiated with the International Monetary Fund and reopened the borders with Kenya. During the years in government Salim also continued working to end apartheid in South Africa. He presided over both the 1981 International Conference on Sanctions against South Africa and the 1984 Paris International Conference Against Apartheid. In 1983 he became the chairperson of the Liberation Committee of the OAU for one year. In addition, Salim served on the Palme Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, which published its report in 1982, and the Geneva-based Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues established in 1983.

Given his diplomatic capacities and international connections, Salim was elected as Secretary-General of the OAU (formally the sixth Secretary-General but, given the long tenures of two previous acting office-holders, de facto the eighth) on 27 July 1989. His predecessor Ide Oumarou, from Nigeria, had been nominated to serve a second term. In the first round Oumarou led by one vote, but failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority, and in the third round Salim received 38 of 50 votes. Salim took over from Oumarou on 19 September. With the end of the Cold War, African countries began to suffer from an increase in internal conflicts. This became a concern for the OAU, which was focused on consensus decision making and non-intervention in member's domestic affairs. Salim took the changing situation in the world and in Africa seriously and developed a personal reform agenda for the OAU, trying to enhance the organization's role as an active partner in efforts to resolve African disputes. He first secured political support from the Council of Ministers, then set up an Inter-Departmental Task Force within the Secretariat to explore ways to frame policy reforms. He also consulted top-ranking officials in the UN and some European countries and in June 1990 submitted a report, which the Assembly adopted without debate as a declaration on Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Africa's Response. The declaration paved the way for Salim to submit specific policies. At the 1991 OAU Summit in Abuja, Nigeria he successfully submitted for ratification a draft document on the establishment of an African Economic Community which, given Salim's extensive relations within the UN System, had been prepared in close cooperation with the UN. This revitalized an older OAU plan and included regional integration schemes meant to increase the role of regional African organizations and to achieve continental economic unity. The economic field indeed proved a sector where the OAU tried to establish itself as an authoritative voice. Salim also developed a stronger role for the Secretary-General in the field of conflict management, which led to the introduction of a more sophisticated institutional system for addressing violent conflict. In February 1992 he submitted a proposal for a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution to the Council of Ministers, which was sent to the Assembly in June. Some of Salim's proposals were toned down, in particular those with regard to the establishment of a comprehensive system of peacekeeping and peacemaking and an enhanced political role for the Bureau of the Assembly in conflict management. However, he successfully created a Conflict Management Division within the Secretariat, which later became the nucleus of the Peace and Security Division of the African Union (AU). After many consultations a revised proposal for the conflict prevention mechanism, as well as a Peace Fund, was adopted at the OAU Summit held in Cairo, Egypt in 1993.

Salim was re-elected as Secretary-General in 1993. He supported the changes in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela had been released and free general elections were held in 1994, with the OAU sending an electoral monitoring mission. Peacekeeping remained a difficult task. Following a coup and ethnic violence in Burundi in 1993, the UN and the OAU were asked to send a peacekeeping

force. Although the OAU designed an International Force for Stabilization and Confidence Building, this could not enter the country due to objections by the Burundi army. Salim then succeeded in creating an OAU Mission in Burundi with a different purpose, namely monitoring the human rights situation. In the ceasefire process in Rwanda the OAU Neutral Military Observer Group (NMOG) played a role, but Salim had trouble finding support for its extension. Eventually the extended NMOG became part of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda. Neither the UN nor the OAU could prevent the genocide that took place in 1994. Despite these weak results, but thanks to Salim's high level of knowledge and diplomatic skills, the OAU began to gain political weight on the international scene. He also widened contact with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and encouraged the nominations of more women to leadership positions in the organization as well as the establishment of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development in 1998. Salim announced the creation of this NGO after consultations with Kingsley Amoako, the Secretary-General of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), at a conference celebrating ECA's 40th anniversary.

In 1997 Salim was re-elected as Secretary-General for a third term, which was unprecedented in the OAU. The general situation in Africa was troublesome, with 11 of the 27 armed conflicts in the world at the time located on this continent, leading to huge numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. Salim urged member states to enhance their efforts with regard to peace and stability. He also characterized the situation of the many people who suffered from, or died of, HIV/AIDS as dramatic. Furthermore, he wanted to strengthen the organization, which resulted in his managing the transformation of the OAU into the AU in the years between 1999 and 2001. He called an Extraordinary Summit in Sirte, Libya in September 1999, which agreed to establish an African Union with both a parliamentary body and a court. During the following months competing visions of the nature of African unity were reconciled among member states. Libya's leader Muammar Gadhafi proposed the immediate establishment of a pan-Africanist 'United States of Africa', but others, such as Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo and South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, suggested a less ambitious institution for the time being, which basically would maintain national sovereignty. In addition, they proposed to establish a complex African Peace and Security Architecture and to increase the power of the chairperson of the new AU Commission. The AU's Constitutive Act was adopted in Lomé, Togo in 2000 and a plan to implement the AU was adopted at Lusaka, Zambia in 2001. A transitional period was established to transform the OAU into the AU in July 2002, which implied that Salim, given the length of his term, would not be the OAU's last Secretary-General. At the OAU Summit in July 2001 three candidates battled for succession: Theo-Ben Gurirab from Namibia, Lansana Kouyaté from Guinea and Secretary-General of the Economic Community of West African States and Amara Essy from Côte d'Ivoire, who was elected as Salim's successor. Salim's term in office ended on 17 September 2001.

Salim's association with the AU did not end at that point, as he soon became one of the organization's key mediators working on resolving violent conflicts. He was the AU's Special Envoy on the Darfur Conflict from 2004 to 2008. During this period he coordinated the AU's efforts with those of the UN, in close collaboration with Jan Pronk in the so-called Abuja Peace Process (2004-2006) and with Jan Eliasson in the UN-AU Roadmap (2007-2008). In addition, Salim served for two consecutive periods on the AU Panel of the Wise between December 2007 and December 2013. Under his chairmanship the newly founded Panel became an important pillar of the African peace and security architecture. After his two terms he remained connected to the Panel's efforts by joining and chairing the Group of Friends of the Panel. At the invitation of the President of the African Development Bank, Salim has been African Water Ambassador since March 2002, with responsibility for advocacy, sensitization and mobilization of support on African water issues. Salim is furthermore Co-Chair of the Eminent Persons Group on Small Arms and Light Weapons (Washington DC), board member of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (London), that supports good governance and leadership in Africa, member of the Global Leadership Foundation (London), an organization that works to support democratic leadership, prevent and resolve conflict through mediation and promote good governance throughout democratic institutions, open markets, human rights and the rule of law, and board

member of the South Centre (Geneva), which was established in 1995 and followed the South Commission led by Willy Brandt and Nyerere. He holds many more international functions and has been awarded a great number of decorations, including some of the highest national honours. Salim continues to shape Tanzania's politics as a member of the Central Committee of the ruling CCM party, as party vice-chairman for the mainland and as a member of the Constitutional Review Commission (2012-2014). In 2005 Salim was among the three finalists chosen by the CCM's National Executive Committee to stand as the party's presidential candidate in the October 2005 general election. However, the CCM party opted for then Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete, who received 1,072 of the votes at the nomination congress against Salim's 476. Salim also steers the Board of Trustees of The Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, which honours the legacy of the late Nyerere and advocates the promotion of peace, unity and people-centred development in Africa and the world through justice for all, and is the Chancellor of the Hubert Kairuki Memorial University, a private medical university in Dar es Salaam.

Salim can be regarded as one of Africa's most skilful multilateral diplomats, both in the UN System and in Africa. Reflecting on his long involvement in the continent's politics, Salim (2008: 68) expressed his conviction that, notwithstanding the many problems and shortcomings, 'Africa is on the right path for a better and even more challenging future'. At the same time he remains worried that the continent, which is endowed with so many resources, continues to be in a situation of almost total dependency on external actors when it comes to financing AU efforts in peace and security. Salim (2014: 13) regards this situation, which highlights the lack of political will and determination among AU member states, as both unsustainable and unacceptable.

2016: publication added and school names corrected

Archives

- Documents relating to Salim's appointment as Tanzania's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York (1970-1980), being President of the General Assembly (1979) and Chair of the Committee of 24 (1972-1980) can be found at the UN Archives in New York, see <http://archives.un.org> (search term 'Salim A. Salim')
 - documents relating to his three terms in office as Secretary-General of the OAU (1979-2001) are located at the AU Library in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (contact: library@africa-union.org)
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