DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN PORTUGAL AND ETHIOPIA

TEXTS OF THE LETTERS EXCHANGED BETWEEN EMPEROR HAILÉ SELASSIÉ AND THE PRIME MINISTER OF PORTUGAL, DOCTOR OLIVEIRA SALAZAR

JUNE 1963

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LETTER FROM THE EMPEROR HAILÉ SELASSIÉ I TO HIS EXCELENCY THE PRIME MINISTER, ON JUNE 17th 1963

June 17th, 1963.

Your Excellency,

We estend Our greetings to Your Excellency.

The relations between our two countries go for centuries back and have been tried and found to be steadfast in difficult times.

Centuries ago, when Ethiopia was threatened by invasion from her neighbouring territories and was on the verge of collapse, the Portuguese Government and people convinced that a distant Christian Nation should not vanish from the earth, rendered assistance to Ethiopia, thus enabling the Ethiopians at that time to repulse the then invaders and preserve their independence and lead their Christian way of life. Ethiopia will always remain grateful to the Portuguese Government and people for the assistance then rendered. However, while We give such a great value for freedom, We cannot acquiesce in the fact that other fellow Africans should remain oppressed in exchange for the

freedom we enjoy. We believe that they too are fully entitled to enjoy freedom.

The United Nations General Assembly has on several occasions recommended to Portugal that She grant independence to the peoples of Angola and Mozambique so that they become masters of their destiny. Ethiopia conscious of the fact that Portugal attaches a high value to freedom, and convinced that Portugal will grant independence to the peoples of Angola and Mozambique has earnestly supported the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly.

The issue of the Portuguese Colonies was once again raised during the historic African Summit Conference held in Our Capital City of Addis-Abeba in May of this year. At the Summit Conference the African Heads of States and Governments unanimously agreed that Portugal should grant independence to its colonies. It was also decided that if the Portuguese Government does not respond favourably to this request all the African Independent Countries should break their diplomatic relations and discontinue all trade transactions with Portugal.

Remembering the old historical ties between our two countries and convinced that Portugal will grant independence to those people under her colonial rule, We have, in order to make a final appeal to Your Excellency's Government, decided to address this letter and send a special representative to Your Excellency. We earnestly hope that Your Excellency and your Government will give due consideration to Our request and find it possible to implement the resolutions passed by the United Nations General Assembly and by the Summit Conference of the African Heads of States and Governments.

LETTER FROM HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE EMPEROR HAILÉ SELASSIÉ I, ON JUNE 29th 1963

Lisbon, 29th June, 1963

Sir,

It has pleased Your Majesty to do me the great honour of sending me Your personal message. Since many centuries there has been, in our relations, a tradition of direct contacts, which has its roots in the proper understanding of the realities and in the mutual confidence placed in the aims of our two countries. It is in this spirit that I thank Your Majesty for the message to which I have the honour to reply.

Your Majesty has referred to the relevant period of relations between Ethiopia and Portugal, when it was given to the Portuguese to assist the Ethiopian people in the task of repelling the invader who threatened at that time not only the territorial integrity of Your noble Nation but also the right of its people to live according to the principles and the ideals of the Christian Faith. Your Majesty has been generous enough to aver that Ethiopia will always remain grateful to the Govern-

ment and the people of Portugal for the assistance then rendered. I take the liberty to add that the Portuguese, in their turn, do not forget that event of their history, which they proudly recall for what they see in it of human solidarity and of understanding of the transcendental importance of Christian Ethiopia which Your Illustrious Ancestors built up and which Your Imperial Majesty firmly defended and is now strengthening and conducting along the path of progress.

Your Majesty, however, states that the love with which the Ethiopian people cherish their independence does not permit You to agree that other African peoples may continue to be oppressed; and Your Majesty invokes in support the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations regarding Angola and Mozambique, as if actually accepting those resolutions as just. We have argued this matter in the United Nations on an essentially juridical basis, because the problem was initially raised in juridical terms. However, I would not be doing justice to the particular position of Your country in relation to Portugal nor to the high consideration which Your Imperial Majesty has deserved of the Portuguese, if I confined myself to replying to Your Majesty's appeal solely with arguments of a juridical character, notwithstanding their decisive value.

Contrary to what has been erroneously said, Portuguese policy in Africa is based neither on oppression of peoples nor on immobility in the presence of the great currents of History.

As to the first aspect, confidence in the high value which Portugal attaches to liberty and to which Your Majesty has designed to make a reference in Your message would enable us to put aside that accusation

without further comments. Nevertheless, I will add that we regret very much that the United Nations rejected a proposal — to which we had given our entire support — envisaging the appointment of two high representatives of that organization, chosen by the President of the General Assembly, to verify on the spot the economic, social and political conditions in Angola and Mozambique. If such investigation had been conducted by independent and impartial personalities, to whom Portugal formally guaranteed full freedom of movement, that body, and consequently all its members, would have had incontrovertible evidence of the falsehood of the accusations levelled against us in this connection. We think that, since the proposal was rejected, Portugal's word should be accepted by all with contestation. Notwithstanding the ill-success of that proposal, even recently we again invited the African States with we have special relations as neighbours or friends to send their qualified representatives in order that, without any responsability or commitment resulting from the fact, they could obtain information regarding the actual conditions in which those territories are developing and in which their populations of all races live and make progress. We do not know up to this moment the response to our offer. In the same context, we woul very much desire that, prior to taking any decision, Your Majesty would send Your qualified representative to Angola and Mozambique with a view to investigating those conditions on the spot and to this effect I extend to Your Majesty the respective invitation.

As to the second aspect, I am in a position to assure Your Imperial Majesty that the Portuguese Government has accompanied with the most careful attention

the processes of the social and economic evolution — and not only of the political one — which the African continent has been experiencing in recent years. To the Sovereign of so ancient an African Nation and to the statesman of such rare clearsightedness as Your Majesty has proved himself to be in the course of Your reign, I know I can confidently reveal our thought and our anxieties.

Your Majesty is aware of the economic and social problem of the African continent. Its development has been and still is markedly irregular and it is seen that, where the social, economic and cultural structures rest on foundations welded by History, as in the case of Ethiopia, there exists a well defined national consciousness. But — and this is chiefly the case in Africa South of the Sahara — there are at present zones of serious trouble which reveal lack of adaptation of the local sociological structure to the conditions and requirements of modern States such as those which it is sought to set up there, although in some cases the territories and populations in question are served by African statesmen to whose intellectual level, administrative ability and dedication one must do justice.

There cannot but be a close correlation between the stage of the economic and social evolution of a human aggregate and its political structure. For this reason we think that it is dangerously precarious to attribute a political statute which has no support on corresponding socio-economic realities. When, therefore, the United Nations Organization proclaims, as it has done, that lack of preparation in the political, economic, social and educational domains does not justify the least postponement of independence for any territory, it is only impelling the populations to chaos in

Africa and laying the foundations to submit that Continent to neo-colonialism. This is stated as a general thesis.

As far as we are particularly concerned, it is Portugal's duty to oppose such an eventuality in the name of all the Portuguese populations of Africa. Knowing that Your Majesty shares a like preoccupation, I take the liberty to avail myself of this opportunity to make a brief summing up of our doctrine and of our achievements and plans.

Since the ineluctability of independence cannot be based on geographical separation nor be justified by racial differences, it is impossible to admit the allegation of oppression by strangers on populations such as the Portuguese ones which, having been integrated in the Nation since centuries, have been taking an active part in the political, economic and administrative life of the national whole. And this means that the criterio defined by the United Nations as the sole expression of valid self-determination are not, in our opinion, justified.

It is evident that, in the long course of History, the natural evolution of our populations and their progress have been taken in account. Particularly since 1911 there has been a succession of reforms in the political and administrative structure of the overseas territories aiming to give them increasing autonomy within the equality among themselves of all parts of the Nation. This autonomy and this equality were reaffirmed in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic which was voted by plebiscite in 1933 and is still in force. In furtherance of this line of orientation, municipalities, municipal commissions, local boards and village boards were set up recently wherever they did

not exist in order that the populations may have an increasingly larger share in the local administration and thus become better able to take up bigger responsibilities at the higher levels of administration of each territory. It the same time and with the aim of stimulating the participation of rural populations in the administration of their interests, new legislation was published in 1961 and 1962 substantially raising the number of the local authorities chosen by election.

The new Overseas Organic Law, which has just been published, is another big stride forward along the path of territorial autonomy. It was drawn up in consultation with the elected representatives of the Overseas territories. A first consequence of this new legislation will be that the Overseas Provinces will send their representatives to the National Assembly as heretofore and non also to the Corporative Chamber, the Overseas Council and other consultative bodies of national scope. In Angola and Mozambiqu, Economic and Social Councils have been set up with elected majorities. The Legislative Councils have been enlarged, the choice of almost all the members being made by direct election. It will be of interest to note that the competence of these bodies includes all matters of the exclusive interest of each province.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the participation of the overseas populations in the direction of political affairs is assured from the «regedorias» (village headmanship), village boards and local boards to the municipalities and municipal commissions at the regional level, the Legislative Councils and Economic and Social Councils at the provincial level and the National Assembly, the Corporative Chamber and the Overseas Council at the national level. From the end

of the current year or the beginning of 1964, the respective elections will start taking place and it will then be possible to form an idea of the implementation and of the representative character of our political and administrative organization.

In certain circles opposed to Portugal, it is sought to undervalue all this structure. It is alleged that the representation of the autochtones in the abovementioned organs is meagre. This language does not mean the same thing to us as it may mean to the critics, inasmuch as we have never been guided by racial criteria: in the Portuguese society each person has the place for which he has the requisite preparation without discrimination of race, colour or religion. In reply to that argument I can, on the other hand, add that, as a result of extended educational facilities, the number of autochtones in the political and administrative cadres of the provinces has increased progressively to the extend that, in Portuguese Guinea, the percentage of representatives is at present 49,5 % and that of substitutes, 54,5 %. In Angola and Mozambique, the percentage is less (around 20 %) but there is very indication that it will increase considerably in the near future. With a view to giving a fresh impulse to the creation of élites in all the territories, we are making enormous efforts to prepare teachers and to build primary, intermediate and professional schools. The universities of Angola and Mozambique will begin to function as from next September.

I would not like to end this list without informing Your Majesty that, at the same time as we promulgate reforms, we are striving greatly to ensure the economic and social welfare of the populations as well as to endow the Health Services with the necessary cadres

and material equipment. In this connection, we requested independent surveys of the International Labour Organization and of the World Health Organization, whose conclusions are for us a matter of legitimate pride, although they are not without proposals for improvement which we are putting into practice. A mission of the Food and Agricultural Organization will also visit Angola and Mozambique within some weeks with a view to carrying out a similar survey in the field of its competence.

The duty of not wearying Your Imperial Majesty with a longer account prevents me from continuing, but I trust that the foregoing information will serve to correct the idea that the Portuguese Overseas policy does not keep proper pace with the needs of the peoples.

Finally, Your Majesty alludes to the resolutions adopted in the recent Addis-Abeba Conference with regard to the common attitude to be taken by the States represented there in relation to Portugal. It does not seem probable to us that such resolutions will be implemented unanimously, not even with regard to the cessation of diplomatic representations, because they are opposed to the vital interests ensuing from relations of neighbourhood which some States will not wish to damage. Should it, however, be otherwise, Your Majesty may be sure that we will not rejoice. For, although as a result of such a policy we will not be the most affected, it has been our unflinching desire to maintain the best of relations with all peoples, in Africa as in the other continents, because we believe in the advantages of international cooperation and we think that it is our duty to derive all the useful results from the interdependence of Nations. We are,

therefore, of the opinion that those decisions will bring to international relations a precedent, the consequences of which cannot be foreseen at the moment but which surely will not contribute to restore to the world the peace and harmony which the majority of the Heads of State who meet in Addis-Abeba certainly desire.

Your Imperial Majesty was good enough to state, at the outset of Your message, that relations between our two countries date back many centuries, that they have been tried and have proved to be firm in difficult times. It has been so indeed for the greatness of the History of our two countries not only in the remote period which Your Majesty recalls but also more recently at a painful stage of the life of the Ethiopian Nation. Even as formerly with arms, in the last phase Portugal not only sponsored, together with France, the admission of Ethiopian into the League of Nations, in opposition to the objections raised in other quarters, but also, from the chair of that assembly, defended the Ethiopian Nation against an aggression to which it was then subjected. We will continue in this manner to fight for justice and for the welfare of populations, notwithstanding the difficulties which are created for us.

I ask myself and respectfully submit the question whether in the foregoing considerations Your Majesty would not design to find sufficiently cogent reasons why relations between Ethiopia and Portugal should continue as they have been for centuries. The Portuguese Nation and its Government would very much regret any interruption of those relations. On the other hand, both would rejoice being able to continue to count on the confidence of Your Imperial Majesty. It

is this confidence that is susceptible of bearing fruit, as is always the case when nations and governments respect one another in spite of divergences, because they understand one another as to the ultimate objectives.

I have the honour to present to Your Imperial Majesty the expression of my highest consideration.

Oficinas Gráficas Manuel A. Pacheco, Lda. — Lisboa