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MESSAGE BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
OAU SECRETARY GENERAL
ON THE OCCASION OF AFRICA REFUGEE DAY

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As we commemorate the 31st Anniversary of the OAU Convention governing the specific Aspects of the Refugees Problem in Africa, the population of Refugees and Displaced Persons on the Continent continue to raise to an alarming proportions. Despite the determination and greater commitment on the part of our Member States to address the scourge of conflicts in Africa, the phenomenon of Refugees is still with us. Unfortunately, rather than diminishing it is increasing into millions. This has in turn become a major source of the crippling xenophobia among asylum states and noticeable donor fatigue on the part of the international community.

Today, 31 years since the OAU Convention on Refugees came into force on 20 June 1974, we should have been able to reverse the trend. This indeed was the spirit behind the Convention. Unfortunately, this has not been possible as the refugee situation on the Continent continue to deteriorate. This has continued to shatter the expectations of many of our people who had thought that the convention would have brought more positive results. This, indeed, has been a source of concern to the OAU in particular and to international community in general. This situation

continues to shutter the expectations that have been created by the coming into force of the Convention in 1974.

It is my hope and expectation that the continue process of democratization on the Continent will enhance efforts towards the building of stronger democratic institutions to support good governance programme as well the promotion of peoples and human Rights in Africa. The democratization process will also provide the enabling environment to sustain democratic principles, opening political space among Member States and allowing for people to fully participate in the democratization process. The democratic dispensation will also create the necessary environment for the politics of inclusion rather than exclusion and therefore address the issue of ethnic rivalry on the Continent.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay deserved tribute to the countries of asylum who have continued to support refugees despite many economic problems being faced by those countries. I should also like to pay tribute to the international community for assistance provided to the Continent in addressing the challenge of Refugees and Displaced persons. It is important to recognize the fact that the millions of refugees who have decided to vote with their feet represent a major social capital for the development of their countries. Many of these refugees are well trained and could be of great service to the asylum or other states. I encourage the asylum states and others who may require the services of such refugees to do so. We fight the crippling xenophobia and in tolerance. At

the same time, we support the efforts being deployed by many of our Member States to end the scourge of conflicts in Africa. It is incumbent for Member States to garner the political will and make the tough, but necessary decisions to address the various conflicts in the continent, be open to democratic processes, pay more attention to the issues of human rights and eradication of poverty. Without the commitment and political will by our Member States to tackle these issues, the problem of refugees and displaced persons will not be resolved.

I would like to emphasise that although the situation of refugees and displaced persons pose a serious challenge to the countries of asylum and those of origin, Member States have constantly continued to share the burden of hosting refugees as recommended by the Conference on the African Refugee Problem of 1979 in Arusha, Tanzania even though they may be among the poorest countries in the world. This is why the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees have chosen the theme for the commemoration of this year's Refugee Day to be REFUGEES : "A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY".

I must point out, however, that currently the asylum countries are finding it difficult to look after the refugees since the resources for maintaining them are diminishing. In this regard, I am appealing to the international community to provide additional resources to the refugees and displaced persons in Africa and to avoid applying double standards when mobilising assistance to refugees and displaced persons. The donor

community reacted swiftly in helping refugees and displaced persons in Kosovo and East Timor while seeming to forget about African refugees.

Finally, let me underscore Africa's Special responsibility in dealing with the problem of refugees and displaced persons in our Continent. As Africans, we should endeavour in a serious and practical way to address the root causes of the problem. Genuine efforts on the part of our Member States to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts, respect of human rights, eradication of poverty and greater participation of our people in democracy and economic processes will go a long way towards the total eradication of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in our continent. *[Signature]*