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Organization of African Unity

**Council of Ministers
Sixty-seventh Ordinary Session
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
23 - 27 February, 1998**

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General of the Organization
of African Unity**

- **Mr. Chairman,**
- **Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,**
- **Your Excellency, Mr. K.Y. Amoako,
UN Under-Secretary General and
Executive Secretary of the ECA,**
- **Your Excellency, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali,
Secretary General of the 'Francophonie',**
- **Honourable Chief Executives and Representatives
of the ECOWAS, SADC, COMESA and IGAD,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to welcome you all to this Sixty-seventh Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, the first session to be held in this new UN Conference Centre. I wish also to express my profound appreciation to H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for having accepted to formally open this session of Council. His presence here is highly appreciated.

Allow me also to recognize the presence, in our midst, of our distinguished brother, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Former UN Secretary General and the first Secretary General of the "Francophonie" and thank him most sincerely for having responded positively to my invitation. I wish to

seize this opportunity to reiterate to him our appreciation for his valuable contribution in the service of humanity as Secretary General of the world body. We, at the OAU, are looking forward to working closely with him in his new capacity as Secretary General of the "Francophonie" in pursuit of our common goals. At this juncture, I wish to pay tribute to the Out-going Chairman of the Council of Ministers, the distinguished Foreign Minister of Zimbabwe, Hon. Stan Mudenge for the able and dynamic way he has presided over our deliberations. I am particularly grateful for the co-operation he has extended to the General Secretariat during his term of office.

**Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In my Introductory Note which is before you, I have raised a number of issues related to financial, administrative, socio-economic and political activities and preoccupations of our continental Organization for the consideration of Council. I will therefore limit my statement to a few remarks.

In the course of this opening session, Council will be witnessing the signing of the Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and Regional Economic Communities. Indeed, my colleagues,

the Executive Secretary of SADC, Dr. Mbuende, the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, Ambassador Lansana Kouyate, the Executive Secretary of IGAD, Dr. Tekeste Ghabray, the Acting Secretary General of COMESA, Dr. Mwencha and I will shortly be signing the Protocol on behalf of our respective Institutions. This is clearly a significant step in the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, establishing the African Economic Community.

Through the signing of this Protocol, the four Regional Economic Communities are demonstrating their commitment to the objectives of the African Economic Community and to the integration process in our Continent. It is my fervent hope that the other remaining Regional Economic Communities will soon be in a position to join the process so that we could all work together and pool our energy and resources in support of the development of our Continent. Indeed, the decision which, our leaders took in 1991, to establish the African Economic Community, is all the more relevant in this new era of globalization and liberalization.

We, at the General Secretariat, pledge to continue to work closely with the Regional Economic Communities and make our contribution towards achieving this African objective. In this endeavour, we are also benefitting from the support and co-operation of our principal partners the

ECA and the ADB. Indeed, I am pleased to report that at our recent meeting of Chief Executives held in Abidjan last month, we agreed to further enhance the co-operation and co-ordination between our three Institutions.

By signing this Protocol, we are therefore sending a strong signal to our peoples and to the international community on our determination to gradually but vigorously pursue, the course of establishing the African Economic Community. In engaging our continent on this path, we are fully aware that what our people are ultimately looking for is development, progress and well-being. We are also conscious of the fact that this can only be achieved through concerted and co-ordinated efforts, at national, regional and continental levels, and that the African Economic Community does provide a unique and most viable framework for this undertaking. Beyond providing a framework for collective action, the African Economic Community offers a continental perspective to support and complement the efforts our individual countries have been deploying over the last years, and ensure that they are properly harnessed and channeled towards achieving our common goals.

It is, however, evident that in order to sustain the efforts of the General Secretariat in the implementation process of the Abuja Treaty, the Organization should be provided with the requisite resources. In this

regard, I would like to count on the support and understanding of Council as it deliberates on the biennial Programme Budget of the Organization. For without additional resources, it would be very difficult for the Organization to effectively respond to the challenges of promoting economic integration and thus live up to the requirements and expectations of the Abuja Treaty.

As we, in the continent, are deploying individual and collective efforts to adjust our socio-economic and political policies to be able to participate, as full partners, in the global economy, we urge the international community to acknowledge these efforts and extend the much needed support and assistance in a spirit of genuine international solidarity. In this context, we are looking forward to a greater understanding and support from them as we address the various socio-economic challenges confronting our countries. The debt burden which continues to hamstrung our efforts at socio-economic development merits particular attention. In this regard, we are pleased to note that increasingly, opinion leaders and other Eminent Personalities in the world are supporting Africa's call for debt relief. I hope that these calls such as the one made by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Africa Hall last month, will be heard by decision makers within the international community and particularly within the developed countries.

**Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

While our Organization is being called upon to assume a greater role in promoting socio-economic development, co-operation and integration within the continent, its role and contribution towards achieving the much needed peace for our people need not be overemphasized. Clearly, the attainment of peace, security and stability will remain our main pre-occupation and will continue to engage most of our efforts as long as our continent is torn apart by devastating conflicts, with the immense suffering they inflict on our peoples. As we confront the challenge of conflict prevention and resolution, we must be conscious of the fact that whatever goodwill and disposition demonstrated by the international community in support of our efforts, solutions to conflicts lie with the parties to the conflicts themselves. We need therefore, to inculcate, within our societies, a culture of peace so that the differences which exist and which will continue to exist amongst our peoples will be solved through dialogue and negotiations. We need to cultivate a spirit of tolerance which could allow people to recourse to peaceful means, rather than violence, to the ballot rather than the bullet. The parties to conflicts in our continent should realize that there is no substitute to dialogue and peace.

At the continental level, we must persevere in our efforts to promote peaceful solutions to conflicts. We need to further enhance our capacity to contain the scourge of conflicts. We should draw lessons from our past experiences in dealing with conflict situations in the continent. We need to work more closely, in partnership, between the region, the continent and the international community at large, based on each other's comparative advantage, but guided by the same sense of purpose and objectives. In this respect, I am encouraged by our recent experiences in promoting partnership between the OAU and sub-regional organizations.

In that respect, we have been co-ordinating our efforts with those of the countries of the region in dealing with the situation in Somalia and I believe that time has come for a greater institutional involvement of our Organization in collaboration with the IGAD countries, the UN, the League of Arab States and other interested parties to ensure that the achievements made, so far, through the Sodere Process and the Cairo Agreement are not in vain.

We have been also supporting regional efforts being deployed in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Burundi. I wish to appeal to the leadership and to all other parties to the conflict in that country to respond more positively to these efforts so as to overcome the present stalemate and engage seriously in the All-Party Talks.

In the Comoros, the OAU has been deploying intensive efforts with the support of the countries of the region, the League of Arab States and the UN to promote a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis. Here I wish to echo the sentiments expressed by the Chairman of Council in expressing our appreciation to the co-operation extended by France in our efforts aimed at ending the crisis in the Comoros. The OAU is still disposed to pursue its mediation efforts based on the need to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country on the one hand and the need to address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the Islands on the other. But to be able to do so, it should enjoy the co-operation of all the Comorian parties particularly the Anjouanese one. Regrettably, however, the Anjouanese Separatists seem to opt for the path of the intransigence and brinkmanship. This is clearly demonstrated in today's reported Referendum on the Constitution taking place in Anjouan. The decision to go ahead with this Referendum despite our appeals and caution is not only in defiance of the content and spirit of the Addis Ababa Agreement and the Moheli Communique, but furthermore, constitute an escalation of the crisis. Council may therefore wish to consider these developments seriously as we seek to find a solution to the crisis in the Comoros which ensures the unity and territorial integrity of the country.

In Sierra Leone, the OAU which took the lead in condemning the coup d'etat, has been closely associated with the ECOWAS efforts aimed at restoring constitutional legality in that country. I wish, at this juncture, to recognize the important contribution by the Chairman of ECOWAS and the Committee of Five for their untiring efforts in search of a solution to the Sierra Leone crisis. I wish also to pay tribute to ECOMOG for its crucial contribution towards implementing the OAU supported ECOWAS Peace Plan. As we look forward to the return of the elected President of Sierra Leone, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to Freetown, I wish to appeal to him and the entire leadership of Sierra Leone to leave no stone unturned to work towards national unity and reconciliation. I also wish to reiterate my appeal to all African countries and the international community at large to provide to the people and Government of Sierra Leone the much needed assistance both in the humanitarian as well as the rehabilitation and reconstruction fields. At the same time, I wish to seize this opportunity to appeal to the leaders of other African countries which are emerging from devastating conflicts, to persevere in their efforts at bringing their societies together and forging new dispensations based on inclusiveness and accommodation.

Looking at the state of our continent and the unfolding events, it is evident that the issue of peace, stability and security will continue to be a major focus for our Organization for some time to come. It is equally evident that African countries and our continental Organization will, as

expected, continue to play a pivotal role in the search for the solution of these crises. The experiences in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the Central African Republic as was the case in the crisis in Lesotho, have demonstrated that where there is a will and determination Africa can make a difference in resolving its own crises.

We need to learn from these experiences and build on the lessons acquired. We need also to learn from the shortcomings of the events in the Great Lakes Region and in particular the catastrophe in Rwanda as well as in other conflict situations which had defied our collective efforts in resolving them.

By taking into account both the positive and negative experiences, our countries and our Organization can be better prepared to confront the scourge of conflicts. Above all, we need to enhance our understanding of what has happened and why it happened as well as strengthen our countries' and Organization's capacities to deal with similar or other types of crisis.

It is amidst this background that I wish to draw the particular attention of the Council to three items before it - all dealing in one way or another with the scourge of conflicts. First, as Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has eloquently alluded, is the recommendation of the OAU Central

Organ at Ministerial level for the setting up of an International Panel of Eminent Personalities to investigate the Genocide in Rwanda and the surrounding events.

The second item relates to the measures which have to be taken to make our continent better prepared both institutionally and otherwise in the area of peace missions aimed at containing or resolving conflicts. The report of the Secretary General on the Second Meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff deals with this in detail. It is my conviction that the adoption by Council of the various recommendations of the Chiefs of Defence Staff adumbrated at their meeting in Harare will go a long way in better equipping our countries and our Continental Organization to deal with crisis situations.

Finally, there are the various external initiatives aimed at enhancing Africa's capacity in the area of Peace Support Operations. I am confident that this Council will consider these initiatives as contained in my Report and see how best our continent can co-operate with our international partners in our quest to rid our continent of the plight and misery inherent in conflict situations.

Mr. Chairman,

This year the international community will be celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The peoples of Africa who, through different periods of our history, have been subjected to the most abusive and ruthless violation of human rights, have every reason to join their fellow men and women around the world in marking this historic event. Clearly, the most significant way of doing so is to reaffirm our commitment and determination to fight all types of violations and abuses of human rights in our societies and to create or strengthen instruments which enhance the respect of human rights. In this respect, I take particular satisfaction in recalling that in this city of Addis Ababa, a few months ago, the African Ministers of Justice, meeting in Africa Hall adopted the Draft Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. This Draft Protocol is on the Agenda of your current session for consideration. I am confident that you will, in accordance with the 'Communiqué' of the Conference of the Ministers of Justice, recommend its adoption to the forthcoming session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Ouagadougou, in June this year.

In conclusion, I wish to underscore that the Organization is preparing itself to play its role in meeting the multifaceted challenges that face us now and the new and perhaps more formidable challenges that lie

ahead as we prepare ourselves to enter the Twenty First Century. In this context, we are working towards enhancing the Organization's capacity through the on-going restructuring of the General Secretariat. Our objective is to usher in a more modern and dynamic Secretariat which is efficient and cost effective and which is more responsive to the needs and aspirations of our Member States.

I thank you for your kind attention.