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STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY-GENERAL  
OF THE OAU, AT THE FIRST ORDINARY SESSION OF THE  
CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE MECHANISM FOR CONFLICT  
PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION AT  
THE LEVEL OF THE HEADS OF STATE AND  
GOVERNMENT

Cairo, Egypt, December 7, 1993

Mr. Chairman,  
Your Excellencies,  
Heads of State and Delegations

We have returned to Cairo five months after the creation within the OAU, by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, a Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa, to renew our faith in that decision and to look into how we can give it the force of action.

Since July, the Central Organ of the Mechanism has become operational and met several times at Ambassadorial level and once at the level of Ministers. This first meeting of the Central Organ at the Summit level offers Your Excellencies the opportunity to review what has transpired since then and to think together on ways and means of giving the Mechanism, operational dynamism as we begin to apply it to the tasks of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts.

Of course, commendable work has been done by the Ambassadorial and Ministerial meetings, in terms of operationalizing the Mechanism, elaborating the rules and procedures governing its work and in the setting up of a Peace Fund to provide resources for its operations. The Fund is now operational and so too established are the various components of the Mechanism. Already the Central Organ is following closely, a number of ongoing conflicts and now with particular reference to Burundi, where a coup attempt last October resulted in the assassination of President Ndadaye, and his close associates and led to inter-communal killings. These are the first faltering steps of the Mechanism, in its process of growth. But these are crucial steps which need sustenance if the Mechanism is to grow into a strong and dynamic force, in the service of peace in the continent.

Mr. Chairman,

You meet at a time when conflicts are continuing to mire this continent into confusion. Old conflicts still persist and new ones have cropped up. While we are encouraged by the positive developments in Rwanda, Liberia, Mozambique, as well as the reported progress in the Angolan Peace Talks, the stagnation in Somalia and the present crisis in Burundi are threatening to confirm Africa into a permanent state of instability and political uncertainty. This is a trend which Africa can not afford to let continue. It is time we began in a coordinated manner to put the collective conscience and energies of the continent to bear on this unacceptable ascendance of conflicts. This meeting affords Your Excellencies that opportunity to launch the process of harnessing the energies of the continent by use of the Mechanism, and apply them to the task of putting an end to the conflicts in the continent. It gives you the opportunity to examine these conflicts and conflict situations and see how Africa can give momentum to the attempts now underway to restore peace to these areas. Today, Your Excellencies meet as the Central Organ of the Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts. The Mechanism is the tool which Africa created, and which it seeks to use in accomplishing the task. This meeting gives you in addition, the opportunity to deliberate on the mechanism and explore how it can creatively be deployed to serve the cause of peace in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

The adoption of the Mechanism was an act of self-empowerment. It was a clear signal that Africa can no longer afford to hesitate politically or to suffer institutional deficiency which have hamstrung numerous attempts to deal with conflicts in the past. In establishing the Mechanism, you gave the continent an instrument, which is indigenous in character and tailored to address our needs.

In the Mechanism, we hope to find the means of providing leadership in efforts and attempts to find lasting solutions to the problems which plague us. To provide that leadership, we must first be self-reliant - self-reliant not necessary in terms of resources to be deployed in the search for solutions to our conflicts but in terms of autonomy in the determination of our priorities and belief in our capacity to pursue and achieve them. That autonomy must find expression in our understanding of the African problems and the means and methods we employ to help resolve them. Similarly, the belief in ourselves must be expressed in terms of our support for the Mechanism we have established.

This synergy of autonomy of the mind and support for the Mechanisms will be crucial if Africa is to make any progress in resolving conflicts. What all this means is that Africa must show in demonstrable terms that it means business, that it intends to put the Mechanism to maximum use. And we can do so only if we have ready reference to the mechanism and if Africa weans herself from the longstanding legacy of mistaken belief that foreigners can somehow provide magical solutions to our problems.

Mr. Chairman,

No one other than ourselves have the answers to our problems. We now have a Mechanism, a means which empowers us to act together in the search of solutions to our conflicts. What we need now is to believe in it, to strengthen it, to use it. In deciding to embark on such a formidable undertaking, we have reaffirmed our belief in ourselves, and in our ability to work together. We have to demonstrate that our institutions are capable of providing viable frameworks of resolving conflicts and helping restore peace in our continent. And I can think of no better way of demonstrating that belief than supporting and using the institutions we create and specifically the Mechanism we have created.

Mr. Chairman,

The manifestation of that belief must equally be political will. We can not proceed, no matter how hard we may try unless and until the countries of Africa have the necessary political will to make use of and support the Mechanism. The strength of the Mechanism will derive from its use. If countries support and use it, more and more will be inspired to have confidence in it and in its efficacy. Correspondingly, if African countries make the Mechanism a first point of call in their search for help, even the outside world will find reason to believe in it. We can not reasonably expect others to take the Mechanism seriously if African countries find hesitation in using it or lack the enthusiasm in their support to it. It is therefore my fervent hope that our Member States will provide their full support to the Mechanism in terms of financial and human resources as well as logistical means.

Support for the Mechanism must involve its popularization within the continent and beyond. Yes, our Governments know of the

Mechanism. It is their creation. But beyond Governments, we should be able to reach the grassroots and let the people know that Africa is now determined to re seize the initiative, through this Mechanism and provide leadership in the search for solutions to the many conflicts now raging in the continent. This is important in order to anchor the mechanism in the thinking of the people of Africa, who after all will be the ultimate beneficiaries of its work.

Equally, we should reach beyond the shores of the continent to those beyond and let them know more of the initiative Africa has taken. They should know the essence of the Mechanism and how we intend putting it to use. My view is that if the world is fully sensitized, we will find ready disposition on its part to assist. At least the rest of the world should know that Africa has not resigned to fate but is making determined effort to address its problems.

Mr. Chairman,

I speak of disposition on the part of the International Community to help, in part because of the encouraging responses we have had already from a number of countries in respect of the mechanism. These countries have welcomed the initiative as they saw in it a new determination on the part of Africa to address itself more resolutely to conflicts and conflict situations. They have commended Africa for this, and they have expressed willingness to assist in material and financial terms. But even with this disposition from outside, Africa can not afford to stand by, wait and hope for outside help. Charity begins at home. We should therefore show example even in our own limited way, by giving practical support to the Mechanism. We may not be rich but we do

have resources which we can place at the disposal of the Mechanism, and which could be channelled to support its operations. Certainly we can not reasonably expect the outside world to shoulder the cost of bringing peace to our countries by itself. We must share in the burden.

Mr. Chairman,

I also speak of the imperative of sharing burden because I realize that even with all their disposition and good will, the donor countries are also facing difficulties of their own, not to speak of the numerous other conflicts outside Africa which equally need resources and attention. The reality is that, we can not and should not elude ourselves that the world will always be there for Africa, with money and political patronage to pass around.

The reality is also that we can not expect the United Nations to do everything. It too, has problems of its own. It is overstretched in terms of world-wide involvement and commitment of resources. And like other international organizations, it is also facing financial difficulties. These limiting circumstances were particularly evident in our attempts to get the United Nations involved in the operation in Rwanda and most recently in Burundi.

Mr. Chairman,

All this is to illustrate that we have few options at our disposal. We have no one to look to but ourselves. I therefore hope that the message from this meeting will be a call to self-reliance even if we shall demand international cooperation. It must be a message of confidence and belief in ourselves and the efficacy of our institution. It must equally be a call for political will and undivided support for the Mechanism. Africa owes this to herself. It is her future, that of its children which

is at stake. We must not miss the opportunity which we now have, through the Mechanism, to put definitive end to conflicts which continue to claim numerous lives, destroy property and undermine our efforts at development.

Let me conclude by stating that I could think of no better venue and more propitious circumstances to convey this message of Africa's faith in itself and its determination to act decisively in confronting the challenge of conflicts in our continent. For, it is here in Cairo, an African capital which has for decades been a symbol of Africa's struggle for freedom and dignity, where our leaders six months ago decided to provide our Organization with an instrument for peace through the creation of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

I thank you.



