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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE
OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF MARITIME TRANSPORT
ADDIS ABABA, 13 DECEMBER 1993

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Your Excellencies the Ambassadors,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of International Organizations,
Distinguished Delegates,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome you today to this beautiful city of Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the Organization of African unity.

Your meeting today, the third of its kind, is an occasion to organize and consolidate your cooperation in such a vital sector for Africa as maritime transport. Allow me therefore to express my satisfaction at the confidence you have that the Organization of African Unity, your continental Organization will be able to make a contribution towards the accomplishment of this noble task. We shall endeavour to do so in cooperation with our sister institutions, in particular the Economic Commission for Africa.

Honourable Ministers,

The responsibilities entrusted to you by your respective Governments in the area of maritime economy drive from the imperative need to bring African economies, more particularly our infant maritime industry, out of the doldrums.

The stake is of vital importance, especially as close to 90 per cent of the continent's foreign trade is carried out by sea. Furthermore, almost the totality of this trade is done with powerful partners outside the continent who have human, technological and financial resources that bear no comparison with our limited possibilities.

It is for this reason that we should stand firm, determined, and tenacious in taking up the challenges by removing any obstacle that may hinder our present and future development.

I refer to our collective development because no African country has enough resources to cope single handed with the adversities which are thwarting our efforts and undermining our potentialities. Hence the need for cooperation that calls for joint appraisal of our needs and the pooling of our resources, with sole and ultimate objective of ensuring the well-being of the people of Africa.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Continent's maritime industry is traversing a critical period characterized world wide by institutional and structural upheavals and by rapid technological evolution which leaves no breathing space for our administrations and maritime operators. Important institutional changes have recently taken place within UNCTAD, in GATT and in our relations with countries of the European Union. As a result, UNCTAD no longer has an organ specifically responsible for maritime transport as was previously the case. A new committee known as the Standing Committee on the strengthening of the competitive services sectors in the developing countries is now in charge of maritime transport as well as all the other

service sectors. It is evident that this change reduces considerably the attention henceforth accorded to maritime transport, and drastically cuts down on the facilities which the international community will, in future, devote to development activities in the maritime sector, particularly in Africa.

Moreover, the developed world has taken advantage of the Uruguay Round to achieve the incorporation of the service sectors including maritime transport services, into the GATT sphere of responsibilities. The aim here is the liberalization of maritime transport services in particular, culminating in a free competition in which clearly only the developed countries and their maritime transport enterprises will emerge winners. The end result will be the further weakening of the African maritime industry.

In fact, the principle of free access to maritime traffic on commercial basis between African shipowners and those of her major partners in the industrialized world is decidedly to the detriment of the Africans as a result of the enormous difference at the level of maritime sector development of the two categories of countries. African States should be conscious of the seriousness of this problem and take urgent measures to provide effective response to the maritime policies of the industrialized partners. These measures should be primarily aimed at the constant defence of African maritime interests in all their ramifications.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has become almost tautological to talk of containerization and maritime transport independent of each other, considering the fact that the container has revolutionized the world maritime economy. As a matter of fact, the container has increasingly conditioned the new generations of merchant ships, their forms, dimensions as well as equipment. It has also dictated the port

facilities and types of equipment needed for the handling of containerized merchandise. Besides, the proportion of container-ships in the global merchant fleet composition is growing from year to year. Finally, containers themselves are undergoing constant transformations and adaptations in the light of the combined effect of technological advance and the bid by ship owners and consignors to gain more and more time in conditions of ever increasing efficiency.

We are therefore witnessing a race towards modernization and efficiency. This forms the basis of the stiff competition among the various maritime interests more particularly between African countries and their major partners in the industrialized world. Consequently, if we are not to indulge in self deception, it must be stated that the position of the African continent in this contest is marginal, and could in the long run end up with the complete absence of Africa in the international maritime scenario unless our countries pull themselves together as early as possible. It is not my intention to overburden you with figures. However, a few statistics are in order. In 1991, out of 1,269 integral cellular container ships in the world, Africa had just three (3) which was hardly 0.2% representing a total capacity of 585, equivalent of twenty feet, as against the world total of 1,734,014 equivalent of twenty feet; and this proportion grows slimmer by the year! The imbalance becomes even more glaring when we consider that in that same year of 1991, Africa placed orders for only thirteen (13) merchant ships as against a world total of 64,700 orders.

It is my view that those in charge of maritime policies in our respective countries should take the situation very seriously and devise a package of measures aimed at embarking on technological advance and at the better management and utilization of the container fleet already available in the continent. These measures

would, in the long term, enable us own containers that conform with standards compatible with our facilities and needs.

A solution to the problems of containerization would enable Africa develop multi-modal transport on the continent and thereby obtain a more significant proportion of the traffic generated by its external trade. It must at the same time be stressed that containerization development also means the inevitable establishment of new port, road and rail infrastructure and the improvement of the existing equipment.

Africa is therefore called upon to contribute to a global effort aimed at attaining this objective which in time and space will require considerable human, technological and financial resources that no African country taken in isolation can provide. In this regard, we need to cooperate in the interest of each and everyone. I wish to invite the distinguished Ministers to reflect seriously on this cooperation which is crucial for our collective development.

Mr. Chairman,

Maritime Transport, a crucial component of any economic system, is of vital importance to the many ongoing development efforts in Africa. It is for this very reason that your efforts, the fruits of your reflections, should therefore not be viewed in isolation but as part of a global effort represented in the African Economic Community, the establishment of which we are all steadily but firmly working towards. In this regard, you will find among the information documents distributed to you, a draft protocol on transport, communication and tourism. Most of the important provisions of this draft protocol deal with the maritime transport sector and will constitute one of the major annexes to the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Your views on this protocol will be sought in due course.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference offers a unique opportunity for considering and agreeing on a framework of cooperation and action among our countries. The challenge is how to improve on the work and efforts of the past and present, in order to ensure a more dynamic and promising future for our peoples in the developmental process. I am confident that you will meet this challenge in unity and cohesion.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.