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Organization of African Unity

**Introductory Statement by
H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General
of the Organization of African Unity
on the occasion of the Conference given by
H.E. Mr. Hubert Vedrine, French Minister of
Foreign Affairs on the theme:
"Africa and France in the Year 2000"**

Africa Hall
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

October 10, 1997

- **Your Excellency Mr. K.Y. Amoako,
United Nations Under Secretary General and
Executive Secretary of the Economic
Commission for Africa,**
- **Dr. Tekeda Alemu,
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,**
- **Your Excellencies the Assistant Secretaries
General of the OAU,**
- **Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions
in Addis Ababa,**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**
- **Staff Members of the OAU and the ECA,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my singular honour and pleasure, on behalf of the General Secretariat of the Organization of African Unity, to welcome amongst us here today, H.E. Mr. Hubert Vedrine, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and his delegation. **Mr. Minister**, I am all the more pleased to welcome you and your delegation as we meet in this historical "Africa Hall" which has been a witness to so many deliberations by African leaders since

the inception of our continental Organization and which is therefore a symbol and a monument in the long march of our Continent towards freedom, dignity and unity.

In receiving Mr. Hubert Vedrine today, we welcome a distinguished French statesman with an impressive career in the service of his country. Mr. Vedrine has occupied various high and key positions including those of diplomatic advisor and subsequently spokesman of the President of the Republic and Secretary General of the Presidency before his appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs following the recent legislative elections in France. He has also held other important responsibilities in the public and private sectors. In receiving Mr. Vedrine, we are also receiving, a friend of Africa who is committed to its well-being and progress.

There is no doubt that with such responsibilities, Mr. Vedrine has been closely involved in African issues and has been in position to share many of the problems and concerns of our Continent. His visit to us today is a testimony to the long-standing relations of friendship and cooperation between Africa and France. Indeed, we all know of the deep and rich political, economic and cultural ties that had linked many of our countries and France over the years. We also all know of the commitment of France towards Africa and its unwavering stance in support of its development.

For the last decades, France has supported the peoples of the Third World and particularly those of Africa in their quest for a more equitable international relations and for the establishment of a genuine cooperation and partnership between the developed countries and those striving for development. It is worth mentioning that France has continued, despite its own economic difficulties, to be one of the few developed nations which has maintained high level development assistance to Africa. The commitment of France to Africa is therefore not only in principle; it is a concrete commitment which is reflected in terms of assistance and cooperation. Over the years, I have personally learnt to appreciate and highly value this commitment.

Mr. Minister,

Beyond the traditional bonds of friendship and cooperation which bring together African countries and France, we see your current visit to Africa as a significant and symbolic initiative by the French Government towards Africa. It takes place at a time when Africa is adapting to cope with the new realities in Africa and in the world and adjusting to meet the new challenges confronting its peoples. Ours is a continent which is deeply engaged in a process of change and renewal through profound political and socio-economic reforms aimed at releasing the energy and resources of our people towards peace and development. Drawing lessons from the past, our

Continent is willing to address its own problems and to assume its share of responsibilities as a full partner in the comity of nations. It is a Continent which is committed to forging peace and development and pursuing vigorously the path of the democratization, the promotion of human rights and the building of institutions to sustain democracy and good governance. It is a Continent which is changing with a new generation of leaders determined to do business and conduct the affairs of their respective countries differently.

You undertake this visit at a time when expectations are high to build a new kind of relations between Africa and its partners within the international community based on mutual respect and common interests and taking into account the new realities in the Continent and in the world. There is no doubt therefore that your current visit, Mr. Minister, will be important in giving a new impetus and a new dimension to the relations between your country and Africa. On my part, as Secretary General of the OAU, I wish to reiterate to you our fullest disposition to work closely with France and with all our partners in building a true partnership based on mutual respect and common interests. We are looking forward to continued and enhanced relations with your country.

It is with all this in mind that I wish to invite Mr. Hubert Vedrine, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, to address us on the topic of "Africa and France in the Year 2000."

I thank you for your attention.