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STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
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Professor Tullia Carettoni,
President of the Italian African Institute,
Representatives of the Italian Ministry of
Foreign Affairs,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Members of the Academic Community,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured and privileged to have been given this opportunity to be the main guest Lecturer at the Celebrations initiated by the Italian African Institute to mark the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations Organization. Allow me, at the outset, to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Professor Tullia Carettoni, for inviting me to speak at this conference on Africa and the United Nations. In my view, this is an important encounter as it is an occasion to take stock of the relations between the United Nations system and the African continent over the past 50 years. Needless to say, Africa and the United Nations share a very special and long-standing relationship. The Africa region, which is one of the largest groups in the UN, has been and still is striving to make its modest but important contribution to the promotion of the ideals of the UN. ~~One would therefore hope that this Conference will come up with concrete recommendations on how to make the United Nations more responsive to the various problems facing the Continent.~~

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been asked to centre my statement on the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with particular focus on its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

Indeed, in establishing the OAU in May 1963, the founding fathers specifically stated, in the preambular part of the Charter, that they were inspired by a common determination to promote understanding among the African peoples and cooperation among the African states. This declaration was in response to the aspiration of African peoples to brotherhood and solidarity, and to a larger unity transcending ethnic and national differences. The African leaders also expressed their conviction, that conditions for peace and security had to be established and maintained, in order to translate their determination into a dynamic force in pursuit of the cause of human progress. In addition, the leaders also pledged to settle all disputes among their countries by peaceful means, and accordingly decided, in Article XLX of the Charter, to establish a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration.

There is no doubt, therefore, that with the inception of the OAU, the founding fathers of the Organization committed themselves to deploy all efforts, in various ways and at different levels, in the search for a peaceful resolution of conflicts. In other words, while the main focus of the Charter was on the promotion of unity

and cooperation among African peoples and countries and the quest for the rapid decolonization and political emancipation of the Continent, the pursuit of peace, security and stability, through a peaceful resolution of disputes, also stood up as a major objective.

In that regard, the OAU was conceived as a framework for collective regional security in the wider sense and, in a more specific sense, as a mechanism for promoting regional cooperation in the political and diplomatic fields with the necessary institutional framework to promote peace, security, stability and development in Africa.

In the period following the creation of the OAU, African leaders were, essentially, preoccupied with conflicts arising out of territorial claims involving boundary disputes such as Algeria/Morocco, Ethiopia/Somalia, Somalia/Kenya, and others.

Between 1963 and 1990, the issues of conflict in Africa were on the whole treated on an Ad Hoc basis, without recourse to the Commission for Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration, despite the fact that this body had been conceived as the sole permanent organ of the OAU specifically and exclusively charged with the settlement of disputes. As it is well known, the Commission had been virtually dormant since its establishment, though it would appear there had been some suggestions and unsuccessful attempts to use it.

It was indeed obvious that the Commission had certain limitations of its own which inhibited its ability to address conflict situations in Africa. First, its jurisdiction was limited to intervention in inter-state as distinct from intra-state conflicts, and second, it was an organ concerned exclusively with conflict resolution as distinct from conflict prevention. Moreover, the dormancy of the Commission could also be attributed to the preference of Member States for diplomatic rather than judicial means of conflict settlement.

The reluctance of Member States to invoke any of the provisions of the Commission prompted the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, as the Supreme organ of the OAU, to resort to other means of conflict resolution. In that regard, the Heads of State and Government decided to set up Ad Hoc Commissions and/or Committees from among its Membership to fill the resulting vacuum whenever conflicts arose. Similarly, the Council of Ministers of the OAU also appointed Ad Hoc Commissions or Committees when the need arose.

The use of Ad Hoc Committees, in the settlement of disputes between Member States, therefore became prevalent in the 1960s, ^{1970s,} and 1980s. Furthermore, the use of Elder Statesmen and Good Offices were also common during the same period. While some of these conflicts were resolved through these Ad Hoc means, there was the

increasingly imperative need however to create a more permanent mechanism for conflict resolution with the mounting conflicts in the continent.

Indeed, with the proliferation of both inter and intra-state conflicts, the need to update past methods of conflict resolution became apparent and the importance of introducing a new political approach and institutional dynamism into the way and manner in which Africa dealt with conflicts became increasingly evident.

In pursuit of this objective, the issue of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution found its expression in the 1990 Declaration adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on "the Political and Socio-Economic Situation of Africa and the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World". In that Declaration, African leaders rededicated themselves to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts - both intra and inter-state. They further sought to put Africa at the very core of attempts at dealing with conflicts, by emphasizing the fact that the Continent bore primary responsibility for resolving its conflicts, even if it were to expect international solidarity and assistance.

In focusing on peace, security, stability and development, the African leaders were also very clear on the interplay between politics and economics in the national development process. In

their view, security and stability were prerequisites for sustainable development. They were convinced that without peace and security, development was not sustainable, as indeed, without development, peace and security could not be durable.

African leaders were also aware of the fact that conflicts in Africa had brought about indiscriminate death and untold human suffering, engendered hate and divided nations and families. Moreover, conflicts had forced millions of African peoples into a drifting life as refugees and internally displaced persons, deprived of their basic means of livelihood, human dignity and hope. Furthermore, conflicts had gobbled up scarce resources and undermined the ability of African countries to improve on their socio-economic conditions.

— *Significance of 1990 Declaration is Commitment to deal with all conflicts. No more tables*

It was, with this in mind, that the 29th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting in Cairo, in June 1993, decided to establish a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within the OAU.

In establishing the Mechanism, African leaders saw the opportunity to shift from the Ad Hoc modalities of conflict resolution of the past to a more permanent mechanism for the anticipation and resolution of conflicts. Moreover, the establishment of the Mechanism marked the emergence, within Africa, of a new institutional dynamism empowering Africa and situating the

OAU at the core of all efforts at conflict prevention, management and resolution in the Continent. The primary objective of the Mechanism is to anticipate and prevent conflicts. In circumstances where conflicts have already erupted, the Mechanism is responsible for undertaking peace-making and peace-building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of such conflicts.

The OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, is guided by the objectives and principles of the OAU Charter, in particular the sovereign equality of Member States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, their inalienable right to independent existence, the peaceful settlement of disputes as well as the inviolability of borders inherited from colonialism. It is also worth underscoring the fact that it functions on the basis of the consent and cooperation of the parties in conflict.

The Mechanism is built around a Central Organ made up of representatives of Member States with the General Secretariat as its operational arm. Its operations are funded through the OAU Peace Fund which receives contributions from the OAU regular budget and from voluntary sources both within and outside Africa. The Central Organ of the Mechanism meets regularly at the levels of Heads of State and Government, Ministers and Ambassadors respectively.

The Mechanism itself has been in operation over the last two years during which it has made significant strides in addressing conflict situations in the Continent. As required by the Cairo Declaration establishing it, the Central Organ of the Mechanism has been able to meet at Summit, Ministerial and Ambassadorial levels, in regular and extraordinary sessions, to adopt various decisions and resolutions empowering the Mechanism to function fully. These decisions represent actions with regard to the operationalization of the Mechanism and have indeed enhanced OAU's ability to address conflict situations in Africa.

As part of this endeavour, the OAU has taken many initiatives with respect to various crisis situations in the Continent. These initiatives include the use of the good offices of the Secretary General, groups of countries, Eminent Persons, Special Envoys or Representatives of the Secretary General, as well as missions from the General Secretariat.

The OAU is currently deploying a military and civilian Mission in Burundi with the objective of building confidence among the various segments of the society in that country. Following the assassination of the first democratically-elected President of Burundi, and the subsequent killings and political crisis that ensued in the country, I went to Bujumbura and held extensive discussions with the Prime Minister, the members of the Government, the Army High Command and the Representatives of Political Parties,

on the ways and means of restoring normalcy in the country and building confidence among the various groups. I subsequently despatched a Special Envoy to Burundi on a fact-finding mission. As a consequence of all these demarches, the Government of Burundi requested OAU's assistance in the form of a Mission of Protection for the Restoration of Confidence in Burundi comprising a civilian and a military component. Following negotiations with the concerned parties in Burundi, it was agreed that the OAU mission would have 47 military officers while the number of civilian elements remained flexible. The civilian officers have in fact been in Burundi since 27 December 1993 while the military elements arrived in March 1994. The OAU mission is placed under the overall responsibility of a Special Representative of the Secretary General and has since its arrival in Burundi, been trying to discharge its responsibility under very difficult conditions. Though we are still very concerned over the fact that the political and security situation has not improved despite sustained efforts by ^{the OAU and} the international community, we can at least be comforted by the fact that a major tragedy has so far been averted. We want to believe that the OAU, through its involvement in Burundi, has somehow been instrumental in forestalling such an unfortunate development.

In the case of Rwanda, the OAU played a significant role, together with the countries of the region, which led to the signing of the Arusha Peace Accord. ^{genocide and massacres} Since the ~~tragic events~~ of 1994, the OAU has maintained its presence in Rwanda and is contributing

Explanation Role in
 negotiations;
 the deployment of military observers
 from Senegal, Nigeria, Zaire, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Mali,
 Congo, Tunisia
 - Letter 7 (20) by October 1993 which we
 handed over to UNADOC -

towards the realization of durable peace, security and understanding in that country.

In Liberia, the OAU continues to support the efforts of the ECOWAS countries particularly through the important contribution of the OAU Eminent Person and former President of Zimbabwe, Prof. Canaan Banana.

In Somalia, the OAU has been instrumental in focusing the attention of the international community on the tragedy unfolding in that country right from its inception. It has equally supported efforts, ~~esp~~ especially those of the United Nations, aimed at finding a peaceful and negotiated settlement to the crisis. In its own modest way, the OAU has also strived in significant manner, to promote understanding and narrow the differences among the Somali factions.

In some other area, the OAU played a central role in the mediation process aimed at restoring normalcy in the Congo. Furthermore, the Organization helped in defusing the crisis which developed in Gabon following the general elections in that country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

X Although the track record of the OAU in addressing conflict situations is ~~somewhat~~ ^{encouraging} impressive, its operational efficacy has

been impeded by the lack of an Early Warning Capability. It has accordingly, been preoccupied over the last two years, with exploring ways and means of establishing an Early Warning System within the Secretariat, to help strengthen its capacity to predict and prevent conflict situations in the continent. To that end, it intends to organize a Seminar on the establishment of an Early Warning System on Conflicts in Africa. This seminar is scheduled to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 15- 18 January 1996. Its primary objective is to provide a forum for exchange of information, with a view to bringing conceptual clarity and coherence to the measures which need to be taken as well as to the modalities for setting up an early warning system on conflicts in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have provided an overview of OAU's activities in preventing and resolving conflicts in Africa. As you are aware, the emphasis of the OAU Mechanism is on the anticipation and prevention of conflicts. I would however wish to seize this opportunity to brief you on our thinking as far as peace-keeping is concerned.

Indeed, since the adoption, in 1993, of the Cairo Declaration on the establishment of the Mechanism within the OAU, ideas have been emerging both within and outside the Organization, on the peace-keeping role or function of the Mechanism. Many significant developments have also occurred in the Continent, with respect to

peace-keeping including the involvement of the OAU in mounting small-scale missions of a peace-keeping character such as the establishment of a Neutral Military Observer Group in Rwanda prior to the signing of the Arusha Peace Accord and the ongoing OAU Mission in Burundi. All these developments point to the fact that while the OAU needs to focus attention on the prevention of conflicts, it cannot, in certain circumstances, shirk its responsibility in peace-keeping. Similarly, changes - including increasing reluctance on the part of the leading world powers, especially those in the UN Security Council, to contribute personnel and to participate in peace-keeping operations in Africa, as was made clear in the case of Liberia, Burundi and Rwanda - have introduced new elements in the international environment. These changes and new elements require that the OAU examine the implications of this new equation. Further, lessons were learnt from the experiences in Somalia and Rwanda, where the international community lost critical time in securing the required troops and logistical needs. As a result, many countries in Africa, and indeed in the world at large, are now convinced on the need to consider how Africa can build a capacity for peace-keeping to be put at the disposal of the UN and, in exceptional circumstances, of the OAU.

It is for the above reasons that the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, at its last session in Addis Ababa in June 1995, agreed on the need for Africa to develop some capacity in

peace-keeping. As a follow-up to that decision, the OAU is in the process of organizing a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of member countries of the Central Organ, to determine the feasibility of establishing an African capability for peace-keeping and the practical modalities involved. The meeting is expected to exchange views and information on the technical issues relating to peace-keeping operations and to come up with concrete and practical recommendations which will guide the OAU secretariat on matters pertaining to peace-keeping.

Finally, one important dimension of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution is the cooperation and sharing of responsibilities between the OAU and the UN on the one hand, and between the OAU and other regional organizations on the other. We, at the OAU, believe that there is need to develop a partnership for peace in Africa to avoid duplication of efforts and actions at cross purposes. There is need, we think, for close coordination of the actions of the organizations and countries involved. We should also avoid the multiplication of initiatives without prior appropriate consultation among the institutions and countries concerned. We further believe that once an organization or a group of countries which stand the best chance of success in dealing with a particular conflict are involved in such an endeavour, the other countries and organizations should be playing a supportive role. We need therefore, to harmonize and coordinate our efforts, through a permanent channel of consultations.

While I am still on the Mechanism, I cannot but refer to an important aspect of OAU's involvement in Member States which, in our view, is one way of preventing conflicts. I am, in this regard, referring to efforts made at supporting democratic transition in Africa. The OAU has indeed, been able to observe, upon invitation, 41 elections or referenda in 28 Member States, including the most recent ones in Tanzania, Algeria and Cote D'Ivoire. In all these instances, the OAU Observer Groups have pronounced themselves on the conduct of the election processes observed. In all cases of election observation, OAU teams strived to make an objective assessment. We are pleased with the fact that Member States are increasingly entrusting the OAU with the responsibility of observing elections. We are also proud that the democratization process in Africa is gaining ^{Momentum} ~~foot~~. Clearly, this is one area which the OAU intends to pursue vigorously as it is our firm belief that the democratization of political life in our countries and the building of democratic institutions and a culture of tolerance are a prerequisite for peace, security and stability in our Continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the obvious, namely that primary responsibility for preventing and resolving a conflict rests with the parties in conflict themselves. Our role in the OAU, and that of the international community at large, is only to facilitate the peace-making process and support the efforts of the parties concerned.

I wish to seize this opportunity to express, on behalf of the OAU, our appreciation for the assistance provided us by the international community. I wish, in particular, to put on record, our thanks to the Government of Italy, for its support for OAU's efforts at peace-making and peace-building in Africa, through its generous contribution to the OAU Peace Fund. This kind of assistance and support is most encouraging. With the establishment of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the OAU and Africa have equipped themselves with an instrument for peace. They have also manifested their determination to free the peoples of Africa of the plague of division, death, destruction and human suffering. We should however recognize the fact that whatever ^{OAU}~~their~~ determination, it would not be enough without support and assistance from the international community. Clearly, it is through cooperation and solidarity that together, we in Africa, with the support of our friends in the world at large, can succeed in stemming the scourge of conflicts in Africa so that peace, security and stability can prevail in our Continent and the energies and resources of our countries and peoples harnessed for socio-economic development and progress.