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**Organization of African Unity**

**CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL RECONCILIATION**  
**IN SOMALIA**

**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL, H.E. SALIM AHMED SALIM**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

March 15, 1993

**Mr. Chairman,**

After years of war and turmoil, Somalia is about to embark on a crucial and decisive phase in its history. Finally, its sons and daughters are now coming together, to seek reconciliation amongst themselves and to lay the basis for a new, united and peaceful Somalia. The very convening of this Conference is in itself very significant. I would like therefore to pay due tribute to President Meles Zenawi whose contribution was crucial in ensuring that good preparations were made for the present conference. Through him, I would like also to express my thanks to the countries of the Horn of Africa for the considerable effort they have expended in the search for peace in Somalia. I would equally wish to commend Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his colleagues in the United Nations Secretariat for the unwavering efforts they have made in this regard and which have culminated in this encounter.

I would like to welcome the presence here of the representatives of the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement with whom we have strived, hand in hand, in the search for a solution to the conflict in Somalia.

I would also like to express my very sincere gratitude to the humanitarian organizations and to the donor countries and agencies for their selflessness and generous contribution. Without perseverance and insistence, the task of sensitizing international opinion and mobilizing humanitarian assistance would have been difficult indeed.

Last but not least I would like to extend a special welcome to our brothers and sisters from Somalia here present. The presence, at the highest level, of the leaders of political parties and groups in this conference is not only a welcome development but also augurs well for the success of this historic encounter. Equally encouraging is the presence of the community leaders, elders, representative of Somali groups, regional non-governmental organizations as well as Somali professionals and intellectuals. I would, in particular, want to highlight the presence of the Somali women participating in this conference. As the situation in Somalia unfolded in misery, deprivation, degradation, death and destruction, we never ceased to be inspired by the fortitude, courage and determination of the Somali women.

**Mr. Chairman,**

This Conference is the culmination of the multi-faceted efforts of the international community at all levels and in every respect to help restore peace in Somalia. The role played by the OAU has been commensurate with the profound and legitimate concern raised by the tragedy in Somalia and with the special interest that the OAU attaches to its resolution. OAU's efforts continue to be guided by the overriding objective of restoring peace, security and stability in Somalia and assisting the people of that country in reconciling with themselves. In this we strongly believe that the conflict in Somalia is first and foremost a Somali responsibility and that no lasting solution can be envisaged without their full participation.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I have emphasized on several occasions that the OAU and the international community at large can assist the Somali people emerge from this, sad chapter in their history. But we can not do it for them. There is no substitute to a determination by the Somali people themselves to put a definitive end to their conflict and the immense suffering it has caused them. The Somali people and particularly their leaders and representatives have the onerous responsibility to seize the challenge of peace which these discussions provide you. Whether Somalia will continue to persist in the present degenerative anarchy, or whether it will reconcile with itself, heal and rise as a nation again, will depend on what you do here, and elsewhere, as well as in your own country in the days ahead. I urge you to take a hard look at what is happening in your country, the hurt and suffering, the deprivation, the banditry, the shattered hopes of those children whose energies have been consumed by war. Look at what has become of the once proud, united and fervently proud nation of Somalia, now lying in total ruin. Should this have been allowed to happen and should it be allowed to continue! What is it that has been gained in the war and is there sincerely anything to be gained by anyone, in its continuation?

Again I urge you to think of those your children, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers who are the involuntary victims of the senseless war, and who now deserve respite. Think of them both as your kith and kin and as citizens of Somalia who yearn for an end to war and the

beginning of the healing, so that they can redirect their

attention and energy away from self-destruction to the rebuilding of their nation.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The essence of negotiation is accommodation. It involves a spirit of compromise and of give and take. There can be no genuine negotiations unless there is a will to settle in a manner that recognizes the interests of all the parties in the negotiations and the need to balance them in the form of an equitable agreement. For this reason, maximalist positions, inflexibility and rigidity to compromise can only run at complete variance with the spirit of negotiations and undermine prospects for a settlement. If indeed the Somali conflict degenerated to such tragic proportions, it was in no small measure as a direct consequence of political inflexibility and lack of compromise among the leaders and factions they lead in the first place. This time therefore, you should not allow yourselves to persist in those positions. For ultimately, it is not the question or the perception of who emerges victorious or is vanquished. It is that of the triumph of peace and of the Somali people as a whole. It is therefore necessary to summon the courage, to reach out into the innermost strength of the Somali nation and display the collective resolve to put an end to this unfortunate tragedy.

As already stated, I am encouraged by the presence of representatives of so many groups in Somalia as well as of women. We take this turn out is a manifestation of the new resolve on your part to speak to each other frankly, with the common purpose of discussing the problems, narrowing the differences and gradually moving into concrete agreement. I hope you will not miss this opportunity.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Today, the combined efforts by the International Community in response to the human tragedy in Somalia, has begun to ease the suffering of the people. But the conflict in Somalia and the underlying social, political, economic and security problems remain unresolved. It is important to consolidate the present phase of humanitarian assistance and to gradually extend reach of food and material distribution to the more than two million people who are still in dire need. In order however that such expansion of the humanitarian programme is made possible, it will be necessary to progressively also address those other issues which are inter-play to produce the complex of the Somali conflict.

But the ability of the international community to do so effectively will hinge on progress in the resolution of those issues. Resolution of the problem of insecurity will depend on the pace of movement and progress in the political negotiations on ending the conflict. And this, the international community can not do. It will have to be done by the Somali people themselves and their leaders. For ultimately even if disarmament of the warring factions can be carried out by the international community, no conclusive solution is possible without the full involvement and co-operation of the Somalis themselves. At the sometime, there can be no consolidation of the humanitarian phase and arching into the long term measures of rehabilitation and reconstruction without securing the critical link of political settlement. This stage you are embarking on now - that of national reconciliation holds the key to a durable settlement of the conflict and to re-emergence of Somalia as a nation.

**Mr. Chairman,**

In this world, replete with problems - all deserving attention and requiring resources, it is not realistic to think that international interest in the Somali misfortune can be sustained for ever. Nor is the patience of the world with the present pace of political movement there, infinite. The Somali people and especially you the leaders must convince the world that, you are making genuine and determined efforts to resolve your differences so as to make it easier for assistance to be provided and to give strength to the argument for sustaining international effort and resources at requisite levels. Only when the international community is fully convinced that the Somalis themselves are serious about peace and reconstruction, will it be possible for it to sustain interest. We, and yourselves, must make it possible for the world to continue being interested in the plight of Somalia, even after the glare of the television cameras will have ceased focussing on that country.

But equally we in the OAU and the donor community must be realistic and acknowledge that there has been a devastating war which engendered so much division, suspicion and mistrust. The total collapse of government, infrastructure and social order presents a very serious obstacle to any effort. We will have to be realistic enough to see this difficulty and accept that things may not move as fast as we may want them to. The process of re-establishing law and order, of restoring confidence among the people; and ultimately of re-establishing a central authority, which can effectively take charge of the process of restoring Somalia to normalcy, will inevitably be painstaking and will therefore require time and patience. While therefore we should reasonably expect the Somali people

and in particular their leaders, to move swiftly and purposefully, we should be able to balance that expectation with the enormity of the tasks which have to be fulfilled and the challenges to be met. We should therefore help the Somali people with our understanding as we should indeed continue to urge them to move fast. But it is important for our Somali brothers and sisters to bear in mind that given the present situation and the global situation, time is a very precious commodity indeed.

**Mr. Chairman,**

We all are united in the common objective of helping restore peace and national reconciliation to Somalia, and ultimately with the long term imperatives of rehabilitation and reconstruction. And while we all must contribute to that joint purpose, we do nonetheless have different responsibilities. We in the international community have the responsibility to ensure that the present phase of humanitarian assistance is consolidated, and to move into the more long term measures of ensuring that Somalia regains its feet and is sufficiently strong not to fall back into anarchy. To do this we must not succumb to the frustrations of the process or to fatigue. We should instead maintain our vigilance, keep international attention focussed on the continuing needs of the Somali people and mobilize increased resources for the rebuilding of the country. This however can be done both if there is clear movement in the political process and if the international community is convinced that there is genuine demonstration of resolve on the part of the Somali people to work towards a durable settlement. The



leaders and Representatives of Somalia here present can testify to that commitment by their words and action at this Conference and beyond.

It is only through this synergy that the common but separate efforts of the Somali people and of the international community can be mutually reinforcing and bring about convergence into a viable lasting settlement. We all must play our respective parts. The OAU will spare no efforts in this regard.

I wish you successful deliberations.