



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE TWENTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION/TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF
AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

2 May 1994

Mr. Chairman

**Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation
Your Excellency, Mr. Layashi Yaker, UN Under
Secretary General and Executive Secretary
of the Economic Commission for Africa,
Distinguished Ambassadors and Heads of
Diplomatic Missions,
Distinguished Representatives of International,
Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to address this 29th Session of the Commission and the 20th meeting of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and planning, specially as it coincides with the 35th Anniversary of the Economic Commission for Africa which we are commemorating today. We are honoured and delighted to have with us, on this occasion, two distinguished Heads of State, H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and his Excellency Alhaji Sir Dawada Jawara, President of the Republic of the Gambia. I wish to congratulate most sincerely our brother Layashi Yaker, United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa and all his colleagues on this auspicious occasion and thank them for their untiring efforts in making the Commission relevant to the development needs of Africa. I wish also to express our sincere appreciation to Mr. Yaker and his colleagues for the co-operation they have been extending to the OAU and for the close working relations between our two institutions in the pursuit of our common objectives in support of development efforts in the Continent.

During its 35 years of service to Africa, under the leadership of distinguished sons of our Continent, the Economic Commission for Africa endeavoured to provide assistance and support to our countries in their efforts towards economic and social development. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Dr. Robert Gardener an illustrious son of Africa, who passed away a few days ago. Dr. Gardener led the ECA in its formative years and provided it with a vision and determination to pursue its objectives. Africa owes a debt of gratitude to Dr. Gardener for his indefatigable efforts in defending the cause of our Continent. To his family and many friends and his country Ghana I offer my sincere condolences. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the ECA celebrates its 35th Anniversary, there are important developments taking place in our Continent some of them are positive and many are a cause of concern.

On the positive side, I would like to point out the recent and indeed still ongoing developments in the New South Africa which is emerging after a long and difficult struggle. The emergence of the New South Africa is the result, first and foremost, of the struggle and sacrifices of the oppressed people of South Africa, their liberation movements and other democratic forces in the country, but it is also a result of the active support of Africa and the International Community.

It is with particular satisfaction that we have all followed the just ended first ever democratic elections in South Africa. We are now looking forward to the establishment of a democratic government and the emergence of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa which will soon take its rightful place in the African family of nations and in the International Community. We are also confident that the new South Africa will constitute an important asset for our Continent in its efforts towards development. It is equally our confident hope that South Africa which had been, for so long, a source of destabilization will henceforth be an important factor of peace, stability and security in the Continent.

As South Africa is moving into a new era in its history, the challenges ahead are formidable. For South Africa to be able to meet these challenges and live up to the expectations of its people, it needs to be in peace with itself. This will require that it embarks in a process of national reconciliation, and it is our fervent hope that it will be able to give Africa and the rest of the world a shining example. However, for South Africa to be able to meet these challenges, it will need the continued support of the International Community.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Besides the developments in South Africa, we are also encouraged by the steady progress in the process of peaceful transition towards further democratization and popular participation in our Continent. We are also encouraged by the increasing awareness in our countries of the need to protect and promote human rights as well as by the positive steps taken by Member States in that direction. Clearly, we still have a long way to go when we consider the enormity of the task ahead. However, it should be recognized that serious efforts are being made by our countries in the right direction. We cannot afford diverting our energies and resources in divisive efforts. Instead, we should close our ranks and work together both at national and continental levels in a spirit of solidarity and reconciliation.

It is this spirit which guided our Heads of State and Government when they decided in Cairo, last year, to address decisively the complex issue of conflicts in our Continent and to establish a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. By establishing this Mechanism, our leaders endowed our continental Organization with an instrument for peace and demonstrated Africa's new resolve to assume its primary responsibility in efforts aimed at putting an end to conflicts in Africa. In order to assist the Organization to confront the challenges of conflict, our leaders have also established the OAU PEACE FUND. It is my hope that this Fund

which is already operative will have the full support not only of African States and the International Community but also the support of ordinary Africans and men and women of good will the world over.

The signing of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community in Abuja in June 1991, was yet another positive step in Africa's quest for economic development, cooperation and integration. I wish to take this opportunity to inform the Conference that the required number of ratification by Member States has been attained last month with the deposition of the 35th instrument of ratification. The Treaty will now enter into force in the next few days thus paving the way for its implementation. This will require naturally the full mobilization and commitment of the OAU Secretariat in collaboration with its partners of the joint Secretariat: the ECA and ADB. It will require, in particular, close cooperation between the OAU and the Regional Economic Communities which constitute the pillars on which the AEC will be built. This formidable undertaking will also depend largely on the commitment and cooperation of Member States and their disposition to make full use of this instrument for development, cooperation and integration.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our efforts towards economic development, peace, stability and security continue to be hindered by the conflicts still raging in our Continent. These conflicts are diverting our resources from the process of nation building and development and causing death, destruction and incredible human suffering and misery. You are all familiar with the various conflicts in our Continent and with the efforts being deployed, both at the African and International level, aimed at finding peaceful solutions.

I would like today, however, to refer to the ongoing tragedy in Rwanda and the brutal carnage to which innocent people are being subjected since the 6th of last month following the tragic death in a plane crash, in very suspicious circumstances, of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi and some of their aides. The senseless violence, the wanton killings and massacres perpetrated against innocent civilians, women, children and even sick people pulled out of their hospital beds have outraged us all. These wanton killings and systematic massacres have been compounded by the resumption of the hostilities between the Rwanda Government Forces and those of the Rwandese Patriotic Front.

The OAU, which, working together with the Facilitator, the President of Tanzania and the leaders of the neighbouring countries, has been instrumental in forging the Arusha Peace Agreement, has been following very closely the ongoing developments in Rwanda. It has, through the Central Organ for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, which met on two occasions, and through the Secretary General expressed its grave concern over the systematic massacres perpetrated against innocent people. It has also expressed its profound concern over the resumption of the hostilities between the Government Armed Forces and those of the Rwandese Patriotic Front. The OAU made a solemn appeal for an immediate end to the blood shed and massacres. It has equally urged the parties to put, immediately an end to the hostilities and to engage in negotiations on the implementation of the Arusha Peace Agreement. We have also appealed to the United Nations to assume its responsibilities in Rwanda.

In our collective efforts to halt the massacres and achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities, the OAU has worked and continue to work closely with the leaders of the region. I have personally maintained contact with representatives of both the Rwandan Government and the Rwandese Patriotic Front. I have also maintained close contacts with the United Nations Secretary General and his Special Representative in Rwanda.

At the level of the region, the Presidents of Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire with whom I remained in constant touch have spared no effort in order to bring about an immediate end to the massacres and the hostilities taking place in Rwanda.

In an attempt to seek a peaceful solution to this conflict, a meeting was convened by the President of Tanzania, on 23 April, in Arusha. Both the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front were invited to that meeting together with the observer countries to the Arusha Peace Process. Unfortunately, the two parties could not meet on that occasion. Another meeting was convened by the President of Zaire in Gbadolite.

Sustained and vigorous efforts are being deployed by the countries of the region and the OAU in concert with the United Nations to secure the cessation of hostilities and the resumption of the dialogue between the two parties in the context of the Arusha Peace Process. We shall leave no stone unturned in order to see an immediate end to the massacres and to the hostilities so that the creation of safe areas and security for humanitarian assistance could be facilitated and the conducive atmosphere for negotiations leading to the implementation of the Arusha Peace Agreement could be created.

Mr. Chairman,

If I have devoted so much attention to the crisis in Rwanda, it is because of the magnitude of the tragedy which has unfolded in that country. Besides the horrific killings, maiming and traumatization of tens of thousands of innocent civilians and here let me recall that in his letter to the President of the Security Council of April 29, the Secretary General of the United Nations has stated that it is estimated that about 200,000 people have been killed, there is also the sad factor of hundreds of thousands being displaced and hundreds of thousands forced to flee from their country and take refuge in neighbouring countries. All this constitutes a humanitarian tragedy the like of which has few parallels in our present day world. I wish, therefore, first to salute those humanitarian agencies and organizations which, under very difficult circumstances have continued to render assistance to the people of Rwanda in this their hour of dire need. I also wish to appeal to the International Community to respond generously and effectively to the urgent needs the Rwandese people both those inside Rwanda and those on the exodus.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is essential to realize that the international political and economic relations have undergone serious and profound changes in the past few years. We now live in a unipolar world with a single political and economic ideology. The protagonists of this new ideology are determined to shape the world on their image. Africa, I hasten to say does not figure prominently on their agenda.

This is clearly demonstrated in the onward looking policies of these countries, their concentration on the establishment and strengthening of their economic groupings, their action as developed countries to take decisions affecting the whole world economy. They are doing this in their perceived self interest and they cannot be blamed for that.

This fact however, have not been fully realized by us in Africa. We continue to lament lack of international understanding and cooperation. It is high time we realized that we have to fend for our selves if we are to be relevant in this new world order based on competition. For too long in Africa, we have been rich in plans, action programmes and decades designated to assist some specific sector. It is high time we moved from the domain of words to that of action. Action at the national level where it really counts. We have made commitment after commitment in this very hall only to

come a few years later and find out that at the national level these commitments were not implemented in the majority of our Member States and that even in some of them they were little known. We have a duty and obligation to not let this happen any more.

Most important among our recent commitments is the signing - and now its ratification - of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community.

It is important to stress that this Treaty is not an exclusive affair of the OAU Secretariat or the Joint Secretariat of the OAU/ECA and ADB. Indeed it is not an exclusive affair of the African Governments who signed and ratified it. It is indeed an affair of the African peoples, the ordinary men and women on whose behalf the Governments have acted. It is therefore imperative that every government take all necessary measures to involve all segments of the society in the Community Affairs through popularization, information and mobilization so that this formidable African challenge could be met. And do we have any other option?

The current economic situation of our Continent is a cause of great concern. Structural Adjustment Programmes, the crushing burden of the debt, the collapse of commodity prices and our own mismanagement of our economies have rendered our people even poorer in terms of per capita income and quality of life than they were after the first decade of independence. The achievements we have had in that decade in

health, education, infrastructure and in production capacity have been eroded. The gap is widening between Africa and the rest of the world. Our continent is now heading the list of least developed by every human development indicator. Yet Africa is rich in every conceivable way, it is rich with virgin land for agriculture, it is rich in mineral resources including energy, it is rich above all with its people and their determined spirit to face all odds and disasters, natural and man made.

We should stop and ask ourselves why this paradox of abject poverty in the midst of all these riches. We have a responsibility to ourselves and future generations of Africans to resolve this paradox and release the creative energies of our people to contribute fully to their own development and well being. In this respect, we should create the necessary environment for all the African people particularly women and youth to fully participate in the process of development. I firmly believe this can only be achieved through an open national dialogue in which all the facts are given to the people together with the options open to the country. The national choice will then become the responsibility of all the people and the sacrifices which will have to be made will find more acceptance and cooperation on the part of all concerned.

Top priority should be given in this process to food security. We have been talking about food security on the basis of collective self-reliance since the mid 80s when we adopted APPER. Almost 10 years later the situation has not

improved. We continue to rely on food aid and food imports which are consuming a large part of our meager export earnings. No country can consider itself free until it has the wherewithal to provide the basic needs of its people.

Food is a key issue in our freedom of choice and should receive our full attention. For too long our continent has been ravaged by the trinity of doom, hunger, disease and illiteracy. We should resolve and act that this should be no more.

Our struggle for economic and social development has never been more difficult or complicated. It is destined to take place in an inimicable if not hostile international environment. While we build for today, we have to ensure that we do not do un-repairable damage to our environment for today. We have to toil under a heavy load of foreign debt which is absorbing on the average more than a quarter of our export earnings. We have to produce much more to acquire the same amount of foreign exchange we got last year as a result of the collapse of our commodity prices. The international community should at least provide us with a level fold of play by removing or alleviating the debt burden.

**Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This Conference should become a turning point where Africa move from the domain of words to that of action. It is, therefore, my ardent hope that Member States will translate their commitments in this Conference and in the Abuja Treaty into concrete national priorities and programmes for the transformation of their countries and Africa as a whole.

I thank you for your attention.