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STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU,
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, AT THE FIRST EXTRAORDINARY
SESSION OF THE SUMMIT OF THE CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE OAU
MECHANISM FOR PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

LOME, TOGO

26 MARCH 1997

Your Excellency, General Gnassingbe Eyadema,
President of the Republic of Togo,
Your Excellency Paul Biya,
President of the Republic of Cameroon
and Current Chairman of the OAU,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government
and Heads of Delegation,
Your Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan,
Secretary General of the United Nations,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish, at the outset, to welcome you all to this beautiful city of Lome, the capital of Togo, a country whose people are renowned for their traditional African hospitality. I wish in particular, to put on record my profound appreciation and gratitude to President Eyadema, the Government and people of Togo for the fraternal and warm hospitality accorded to all of us, since our arrival, and for the laudable efforts made to host this important meeting, at such short notice.

It is also my pleasure to recognize and welcome our brother Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, who is attending a meeting of our Organization at Summit level for the first time, since his assumption of office.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today for the first ever Extraordinary Summit of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, which is being held in rather compelling and extraordinary circumstances. Indeed, the grave and complex crisis in the Great Lakes Region, particularly, the rapidly evolving developments in Eastern Zaire and their far-reaching implications for peace, security and stability in the Region and the continent as a whole, have been a source of deep concern within and outside Africa.

It was out of this shared concern, that the countries of the Region, held a series of meetings at Summit and Ministerial levels, and undertook several initiatives aimed at promoting a peaceful solution to the crisis. In this regard, I wish to pay special tribute to President Daniel T. Arap Moi of Kenya for his untiring efforts in search of a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis in Eastern Zaire. The Nairobi initiative under the committed stewardship of President Daniel Arap Moi has not only served as an eloquent testimony of Africa's concern on the situation but it has also provided an important momentum in the search of a political solution to the crisis. Clearly, President Moi deserves our collective appreciation for his efforts. Let me also express my appreciation to President Pascal Lissouba of Congo for his efforts at promoting regional understanding which

is most desirable in facilitating a durable solution to the conflict. In the same vein, I wish to highlight the continuing efforts deployed by President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, in promoting dialogue between the Zairean Parties, in the context of the peace efforts pursued within the framework of the Nairobi initiative.

The crisis in Eastern Zaire has also been a preoccupation for our leaders all over the continent, who have been appealing for a cessation of hostilities and a peaceful settlement of the ongoing conflict. It was within that context that our host, President Eyadema, made an appeal for urgent collective efforts, through the continental Organization, to safeguard the cohesion, unity and territorial integrity of Zaire. Subsequently, General Sani Abacha, Head of State of Nigeria, President Eyadema of Togo and President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, issued a joint appeal calling for restraint and for a peaceful solution, in conformity with the principles enshrined in the Charter of our Organization, as well as for the convening of an emergency Summit of the Central Organ. It is also a matter of record that considerable efforts have been made by countries and Organizations outside Africa - some of whose representatives are present here with us - aimed at ending the crisis.

The OAU and the UN have also made persistent efforts to defuse the crisis. In this connection, I have been in regular contact with our Current Chairman, President Paul Biya of Cameroon, who himself has been actively seized with the crisis and has deployed his own efforts towards its resolution. In view of the complexity of the problem and the need for greater coordination and harmonization of our efforts, the Secretary General of the United Nations and I agreed to appoint a joint Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region. Since his appointment, Ambassador Mohammed Sahnoun has undertaken widespread consultations with the Government of Zaire and the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, as well as with the countries of the Region and other interested parties within the international community. As a result of these consultations, he has submitted a five-point peace plan, which was endorsed by both the UN Security Council and the OAU Council of Ministers. The UN/OAU Peace Plan, has been accepted by the Government of Zaire, while the Alliance has, so far, accepted it in principle.

In all these efforts, the common objective of Africa and the international community has been to end the bloodshed, find a political solution to the conflict within the framework of preserving the unity, cohesion, sovereignty and territorial

integrity of Zaire as well as respecting the relevant principles guiding the relations between African countries and the protection of the fundamental rights of our peoples.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While all these efforts have been made at regional and international levels, the situation on the ground has continued to evolve rapidly. The expectations are, therefore, high that this Extraordinary Summit will be able to provide the framework for a speedy resolution of the crisis. Indeed, this Lome Summit constitutes the most significant attempt at a continental level to find a solution to this grave situation. I believe that the UN/OAU Peace Plan constitutes a viable framework to achieve that objective and needs therefore to be strongly supported by the Summit of the Central Organ. But the most urgent issues relating to the implementation of this Peace Plan, are those concerning the cessation of hostilities and the commencement of dialogue and negotiations. I believe that conditions are propitious for dialogue and negotiations to commence without any further delay. I also believe that since we now have the option of dialogue within our reach, the alternative of a military solution should not be further pursued. It is, therefore, imperative in my view, that negotiations and cessation of hostilities should be the

urgent objectives to be pursued vigorously, so as to put an end to the suffering of the people of Zaire and in order not to further exarcebate the vicious cycle of resentment and bitterness which any prolonged conflict and confrontation bring about within a society.

I am confident that the commencement of dialogue, accompanied by the cessation of hostilities, will go a long way in creating conditions for a political solution to the crisis. The presence in Lome, of high level delegations of the Government of Zaire and of the Alliance of Democratic Forces at the invitation of President Eyadema, whose initiative and foresight deserve our commendation, offers the parties a unique opportunity to move the peace process forward with courage and determination. I wish, in the name of Africa, to appeal to both Parties to rise to the challenge of the hour.

The other important aspect of the Peace Plan which deserves the attention of the Summit is the mechanism which is needed to support its implementation, as also recommended by the Nairobi Regional initiative. While the modalities for the envisaged mechanism should clearly be established by the United Nations Security Council, in consultation with the OAU and with the cooperation of the parties, I believe this Summit should

underline the preparedness of Africa to contribute in a significant manner to such a mechanism. At the same time, Africa should reaffirm its determination to continue doing its utmost to promote peace, security and stability in Zaire and to stand for the unity and cohesion of this country, as well as encourage understanding and cooperation within the Region. In such an undertaking the efforts of our Organization should be based on its guiding principles as enshrined in its Charter and other relevant declarations, including the Cairo Declaration on the inviolability of borders as inherited at independence. These are the very principles which have served us well in the past in strengthening the unity and cohesion of our countries and peoples. Their unquestionable validity is self evident.

As the efforts towards a negotiated settlement of the conflict continue, it is of vital importance in the meantime, to seriously and effectively address the humanitarian crisis which has developed as a result of the conflict. We appeal to the parties to allow uninterrupted flow of humanitarian assistance to the refugees and displaced persons. The creation of safe corridors will certainly contribute significantly to the attainment of this objective. At the same time, we appeal to the international community to continue to provide the much needed humanitarian assistance. We must also recognize the imperative

and urgent need to find a long term solution to the refugee problem, by ensuring the separation of the intimidators from the bona fide refugees and in the process, create the conditions for the voluntary repatriation of the refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Beyond the efforts which need to be exerted to find a speedy and lasting solution to the conflict in Eastern Zaire, I believe that similar efforts should be deployed to address the various crises now afflicting the Great Lakes Region as a whole, such as the prolonged conflict in Burundi. In this context, we look forward to the forthcoming Arusha Regional Summit to be held in early April.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Summit in Lome is a Summit of opportunity to advance the cause of peace in that vital part of our continent. It is also an opportunity for Africa to reassert its own determination, to make an effective contribution to the solution of African crises. The presence of so many African leaders here in Lome to participate in this Summit, is demonstrative of the existence of the will in our continent to do so. The challenge before us is in translating that will into concrete action.