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STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU ON THE OCCASION OF
THE FIRST MINISTERIAL SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COMMISSION OF THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC
COMMUNITY

Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

November 20, 1996

Statement of H.E. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General
of the Organization of African Unity at the First Ordinary
Session of the Economic and Social Commission
of the African Economic Community;
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 20-21 November 1996.

- Your Excellency, Mr. Tomothée Ahoua N`guatta,
Minister of State Responsible for Relations with the Institutions
- Your Excellency Mr. Alain Gauze,
Minister of Commodities
- Honourable Ministers and
Members of the National Assembly
- Your Excellency Mr Kingsley Amoako,
Executive Secretary of the ECA
- Your Excellency Mr Omar Kabbaj,
President of the African Development Bank
- Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Distinguished Representatives of African
and International Organizations
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing special thanks and appreciation to the government and people of Côte d'Ivoire for the warm and hospitable reception and welcome that have been extended to us all since our arrival in this beautiful city of Abidjan. We are all pleased that this historical first session of the Economic and Social Commission of the African Economic Community is being held in Côte d'Ivoire, a country which has shown exemplary sense of commitment and dedication to inter-African cooperation and integration. Côte d'Ivoire, through its singular experience of harmony and cohesion between the various components of its society exemplifies the African Economic Community to be. The wise leadership which the Ivorian people have been fortunate to enjoy made it possible to forge a prosperous and peaceful nation with the contribution of its sons and daughters and all those who live in this beautiful and generous country. It is our fervent hope that this spirit of brotherhood and solidarity which sustained peace and stability in this country will continue and will spread all over the Continent.

I would like, at this juncture, to join the host authorities in welcoming the Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations and their delegations as well as the representatives of African and non-African organizations, including the non-governmental organizations, to this meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are meeting today in this first session of the Economic and Social Commission of the African Economic Community which I see as the starting point of the actual work towards building the Community, I cannot but recall the monumental efforts that have been deployed, over the years, by successive African leaders in our long march towards integration and development of the Continent. I recall the Monrovia Strategy which our Heads of State and Government had adopted as far as in 1979 as a way to forge a common destiny of our people through promoting inter-African cooperation. I also recall the historic Economic Summit of Lagos in 1980 on the occasion of which the African leaders translated the Monrovia Strategy into concrete Plan of Action for the economic development and transformation of the Continent.

As you are aware, the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act were not followed with immediate implementation. That is why in 1986, our leaders found it necessary to adopt a framework aimed at accelerating African economic recovery and development. The African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery recognized the centrality of the economic integration of the Continent as a means towards development. These efforts culminated in 1991 when the African leaders signed, in Abuja, Nigeria, the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community which entered into force in 1994.

I thought it was important to remind ourselves of the serious and sustained efforts that our peoples have been deploying in an attempt to improve their conditions of life. In other words, contrary to the perception which is often portrayed, our Continent has not been lagging behind in assuming its own responsibilities for its development. Unfortunately, the efforts made by our peoples have not been always crowned with success due to various factors both internal and external.

Apart from these efforts in the economic field, the search for peace, security and stability has been another major undertaking which has engaged our Continent. You are all familiar with the relentless efforts made by our people and leaders in meeting the challenge of peace in the Continent. These efforts were further enhanced since, in 1990, the leaders in their Addis Ababa Declaration recognized the synergy between the economic development and peace in the Continent and committed themselves to addressing the scourge of conflict with renewed determination. Since then, we at the Secretariat, consider that our efforts at peace and those deployed in the attainment of development are mutually reinforcing and strengthening. Indeed, the need for peace to enable meaningful development cannot be over-emphasized as much as there cannot be durable peace in situations of poverty and starvation in some of our countries. It is, therefore, clear that the search for peace is a precious tool in our endeavour toward development. It is in that context that one should see how the new institutional dynamism, which has been introduced is the way our continental Organization is henceforth addressing the scourge of conflict in the Continent through its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. I wish, in this regard, to place on record my profound appreciation to H.E. President Bedie of Côte d'Ivoire, his Government and people for their valuable contribution to our collective efforts towards peace in the Continent. I thank them more specifically for their tireless efforts and contribution aimed at resolving the conflicts of Liberia and Sierra Leone. I wish also to reiterate to them my profound appreciation for the humanitarian assistance provided to the many refugees who are hosted by Côte d'Ivoire.

**Mr. Minister of State,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is befitting for us all to remind ourselves of the significant step that African leaders took on third June, 1991, in Abuja, Nigeria, when they signed the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community leading to the high expectations, justifiably so, of our peoples towards economic integration. It is vital that the spirit of Abuja be invoked at this point in time, so that the mere signature of the Treaty does not become the tombstone of Africa's integration, but rather the point of departure of a monumental African collective endeavour.

This first session of ECOSOC, therefore, is to serve as a reminder to our governments of the commitment we entered into, in signing and ratifying the Treaty of the African Economic Community. In this respect, I wish to underscore that this important gathering is not just one more meeting. As we progress along the path of implementation of the Abuja Treaty, the importance of ECOSOC - this vital organ of the African Economic Community, will become self-evident.

During the two-day meeting, you are called upon to deliberate on important issues and take major decisions that will have serious impact on Africa's drive towards the achievement of self-sustained growth and accelerated development. These are indeed decisions that should, and must not be delayed. This session will, I am positive, send the right signal to our partners of the International Community.

The present meeting has been prepared over a long period, with the close cooperation and involvement of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, and the Regional Economic Communities. The preparation has taken full account of the work accomplished by the Permanent Steering Committee in the formulation of draft protocols. It is important that the progress made by the Permanent Steering Committee be consolidated and situated within the context of dealing with the priority issues in the first stage of implementing the African Economic Community Treaty.

In this connection, the Abuja Treaty makes it abundantly clear that the African Economic Community is to be established through the coordination, harmonization and gradual integration of the activities of the regional economic communities. Accordingly, priority has been given in the Treaty to the strengthening of the existing Regional Economic Communities and establishing new ones in regions where none exists.

It may be tempting for us to congratulate ourselves on the existence of a large number of regional economic communities and other inter-governmental organizations in our Continent as indications of progress in integration and cooperation. But we all know too well the serious constraints and difficulties facing these institutions which, African governments, in their sovereign right, have established. The financial burden on some of our Member States that belong to several of these

regional and sub-regional organizations continues to be heavy, and at time, unbearable. This situation has forced many African inter-governmental organizations to depend on external funds for implementing their programmes, and as a result, many of these programmes have remained unimplemented, for want of such funds.

Apart from the well-known financial constraint, the large number of integration groupings in our Continent has led to duplication of effort and activities, and created difficulties in programme coordination and harmonization. Thus, the requirement of strengthening regional economic communities has increased the urgency for all our governments, in each region of the Continent, to indicate the Regional Economic Communities or Regional Economic Community that should sign the Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and Regional Economic Communities, recognizing that this important instrument is indeed a set of contractual obligations between all the parties to the Protocol.

I would like to stress that the draft Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and Regional Economic Communities is one of the most important issues for this meeting. Its preparation has taken a long time, and has involved the full participation of the Regional Economic Communities, the African Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa. As an operating instrument for all our sister institutions that are enjoined in implementing the Abuja Treaty, the draft Protocol meets all our concerns. I would, therefore, like to commend it to this important body for careful consideration.

Although many regional and sub-regional economic groupings have been invited to this first session of ECOSOC, I would like to inform this august gathering that so far, we in the Secretariat have been dealing with one community per region as specifically mentioned in the Treaty; it is now opportune that the matter be reviewed based on the present realities and the situation on the ground. Rationalization, programme harmonization and coordination are concepts that we have always talked about, and there are numerous studies and recommendations on them. The time has now come to seriously address these issues in the interest of progress and efficiency.

The special situation of the North African region, which I raised last February at the 63rd Session of the Council, demands urgent attention, because, to date, we have not been able to build the desired relations and cooperation between the OAU and UMA. Besides, and despite the current political situation in the Central African region, there is also a need for the Member States in that region to address seriously the present status of the Economic Community of Central African States, in particular its operational link to UDEAC or CEMAC.

Another area of concern to us relates to the process of creating new economic, monetary and development groupings in the Continent. While we in the Secretariat are making every effort to follow this process, we wish however to stress the importance of these processes to take account of Africa's long-term objective of continental integration. Our priorities as determined by ourselves are now well-known. It is our expectation, therefore, that these development priorities be understood and supported by all.

**Mr. Minister of State,
Excellencies,**

Recent global developments and current trends have heightened the enthusiasm for regional cooperation and integration the world over. Here, in our continent where the need for cooperation and integration is more than ever imperative, these should not be seen as matters of mere convenience. There has to be a demonstration of clear national conviction and commitment that regional integration and cooperation are indeed, a *sine qua non*, to achieve sustainable development. This first session of ECOSOC, therefore, must constitute a turning point for all our Member States and the regional economic communities in our general approach to matters of integration and cooperation and, indeed, in the march towards continental integration.

To enable the Honourable Ministers focus their attention on the critical issues of accelerated integration and cooperation, experts and senior officials from the Joint Secretariat and the regional economic communities, as well as from our Member States, have held preparatory meetings, in June in Addis Ababa, and yesterday here in Abidjan. Following these deliberations, specific draft recommendations and

an indicative work programme covering the period up to the year 2000, are now before you for consideration. The focus in these brief submissions is both on the areas of priority action identified in the Abuja Treaty and the basic requirements for laying a solid foundation for continental integration. I hope that these recommendations will retain the highest attention of the Session.

I also hope that similar attention will be accorded to the crucial issue of coordination of economic cooperation and integration at the national level. Indeed, it is our firm belief that our efforts towards promoting continental integration shall be seriously hampered if there is no adequate coordination and follow-up of integration activities at national level.

I have to stress that, as in the past when our Member States had adopted various decisions, resolutions and declarations, none of the actions and measure submitted for your consideration will have meaning or make an impact, unless our governments initiate and take necessary corresponding actions at the national, as well as regional level. The serious financial constraint facing all our regional economic communities and other inter-governmental organizations, to which I have earlier referred on, is an issue that has to be tackled as a priority. Our governments have to assume fully their responsibility to these institutions which they have created, by honouring their financial obligations based on their assessed contributions. It has to be recognized that African integration is our responsibility, and its financing cannot be left to international charity.

**Mr. Minister of State,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As we are meeting here today to take concrete steps on how to build the African Economic Community, I personally feel that we are involved in deciding on the future and destiny of our people. The African Economic Community is a serious undertaking. It concerns the conditions of life of our people. It needs the contribution of all at national level, including the public sector, the private sector, the civil society as a whole with the youth, the business community and above all the

women. There is a need to popularize the Abuja Treaty among our peoples. It needs to be discussed at our institutions of higher learning.

Building the African Economic Community will take some time. This march started 30 years ago with the very inception of the OAU which objective is to promote unity and cooperation in the Continent. We have laid down the foundation of the Community and today we are called upon to lay the first stone of our common house to ensure a better and prosperous future for our people. We need to be patient since the task ahead is not an easy one. But we should pursue it with determination, dynamism and courage.

The African Economic Community Treaty is now in force, and we are meeting here today to decide on the immediate concrete actions for its implementation. The commitment that our governments assumed willingly will be put to test from now on. It will be the test of Africa`s seriousness with itself; a test of the vision of Africa`s present leadership; a true test of Africa`s mature and independent judgement; a test of Africa`s determination to reverse and end its increasing marginalization and thus change the global perception of Africa as the continent engulfed in endless conflicts, wars and instability and with a bleak economic future.

The First Session of ECOSOC is for major decisions - decisions on the future of our Continent. I have no doubt that we are ready and prepared to take these decisions.

I thank you.