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**Fourth Extra-Ordinary Session
Assembly of Heads of State and Government
Sirte – Libya
8 – 9 September 1999**

***STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU***

- *Your Excellency, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria and Current Chairman of the OAU,*
- *Your Excellency Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, Leader of The Great First of September Revolution of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya;*
- *Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,*
- *Your Excellency, Dr. Ismat Abdel Meguid, Secretary General of the League of Arab States;*
- *Honourable Ministers,*
- *Distinguished Guests,*
- *Excellencies,*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I wish to join the Current Chairman in welcoming you all to this 4th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, being held less than two months after the Leaders gathered in

Algiers for the 35th Ordinary Session of the Assembly. In deciding to come here in great numbers, the Leaders wanted first and foremost to honour the invitation extended to them by the Leader of the El Fatah Revolution, our brother, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, express their solidarity with the Libyan people, and join them in the celebrations marking the 30th Anniversary of the Revolution. Let me at this juncture salute the people of the Great Arab Libyan Jamahirya on this most auspicious occasion and extend to them our most sincere congratulations for the achievements they have made under the leadership of our brother, Colonel Gaddafi. Let me also say how we were all impressed and moved by the grand military parade that we witnessed yesterday. The significance of the participation of military units from more than thirty African States, however symbolic, cannot be underestimated. Indeed, what we have witnessed enhanced our confidence in Africa's ability and capacity to engage in peace-keeping operations in the promotion of peace, security and stability in our continent.

We are all the more pleased that this session is held in Sirte, this historic and beautiful city which in recent times, has played host to many peace encounters and which symbolizes the commitment of the leadership of this country and the Libyan people to peace, unity and solidarity on our continent. The presence of so many leaders here is also an acknowledgement and appreciation of the long standing support extended by the Libyan people to our collective struggle against colonialism and apartheid and to the cause of unity, solidarity and dignity on the continent.

Our meeting is also being convened at a time when the people of this country are emerging from a period of trial and difficulties brought about by the imposition of sanctions. I wish to seize this opportunity to once again pay a deserving tribute to the Libyan people for their courage and sacrifices and for the flexibility demonstrated by their leadership in seeking a fair and just solution to the dispute between Libya and the USA and the United Kingdom over the Lockerbie issue. Throughout the crisis, our continental organization

stood firm for the principles of justice and fairness, and played a critical role together with the League of Arab States and others in the search for a lasting solution in conformity with international law. The combined efforts of all people of good will, including President Mandela, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and the UN Secretary General, culminated in a solution and the suspension of sanctions by the UN Security Council against Libya. Now that the sanctions have been suspended, we are looking forward to their very early and total lifting. In this regard, we are encouraged by the full disposition of Libya leadership to honour its commitment.

Beyond the celebrations and the expression of our solidarity with the Libyan people, the Assembly is convened here to discuss the specific issue of strengthening our continental organization to enable it to meet the challenges of the next millenium. We are grateful to our brother, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi for having made the proposal to discuss this pertinent issue which has been a source of concern to our people and Leaders over the years.

Indeed, our Organization was established to be an instrument for unity, solidarity and to promote understanding and cohesion, amongst and between our peoples. Despite many constraints and shortcomings, the Organization has over the years, served the interest of the continent and its peoples well. However, there has always been the realization on the part of the Leaders, that our Organization can and should do more in the service of our continent. Efforts have thus been deployed to enhance the capacity of the Organization so that it can respond more effectively to the aspirations and demands of our peoples. This disposition was clearly articulated by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in its 1990 Declaration in which it asserted that the destiny of the continent should lie in the hands of its people and leaders. The Leaders solemnly committed themselves to work together to address the challenges of peace, democracy and development. This commitment was given further impetus through the adoption in 1991 of the Abuja Treaty, establishing the African Economic Community, as an African blueprint for collective and self reliant development, with the ultimate objective of bringing the

African people together, within the framework of a community based on common interests and destiny. This commitment was further underscored in the 1993 Cairo Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, establishing a Mechanism on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, as a dynamic institutional framework for addressing the scourge of conflicts and promoting peace, security and stability on the continent. Other far reaching decisions relating to democratization, human rights and governance have also been adopted by the Policy Organs of the OAU.

Today, as we prepare to enter the next millenium, and as the continent is confronted with daunting challenges posed by globalization, we see the need to critically review the performance and role of our Organization, in the light of experiences gained. In doing so, we should be guided by the need to address our shortcomings and build on our achievements. In the process, we should review the extent to which we have been able to implement our commitments and where we have not been able to do so, to draw the necessary lessons, and whenever needed, agree on

different ways and means of ensuring effective and efficient implementation of our decisions. At a time when other regions in the world are making gigantic strides in improving the living conditions of their peoples and coming together to promote economic cooperation and integration, we in Africa need to match our words with our deeds, if we are to avoid further marginalization.

Over the years, our experience has shown that Africa is never short of ideas. What is, however, missing are the will and means to translate such ideas into concrete and practical measures. We have, since mid 1970s, developed various regional strategies and blueprints to address specific problems that our continent has encountered in our post-independent development history including, in particular, the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Invariably, we have individually and collectively committed ourselves and our people to implement those strategies and blueprints.

But, there is a big gap between our intentions as expressed in the various declarations, resolutions and decisions, and our political will and capacity to implement them. For it is one thing to make declarations and commitments and it is another to marshal the necessary political will to implement such declarations, resolutions and decisions.

As we consider ways and means of strengthening our continental organization, it is important to reflect on the extent to which we have lived up to the expectations of our people by implementing the declarations and other decisions of the Assembly and other policy organs of the OAU. We should be aware of the fact that our voice will remain weak and our positions neglected if we do not implement what we have agreed to do for the benefit of the present and future generations of this continent.

There are commitments that we have already made, there are instruments we have pledged to consolidate and there are institutions whose foundations we have

succeeded to establish. This Summit should aim at reinvigorating the process leading to the attainment of these aspirations and objectives and provide guidance on how to accelerate the steps towards our long term vision.

Our historical experiences show that we have always succeeded where we have resolved and agreed to implement the decisions that our governments have taken. There is ample evidence to suggest that honouring commitment and implementing decisions always pay. This was the case during the liberation struggle. And our success in the war against colonialism and minority regimes in Africa was largely because we were able to honour and implement our commitment. Similarly, our ability to meet our obligations has provided us with a stronger voice in international fora.

What we need to do now, in order to ensure that our continental organization is strong enough to implement its agenda for peace and development is to revive our

spirit of unity and Pan-Africanism and a sense of purpose and direction. We need therefore, to rekindle our vision of a United Africa which inspired the founding fathers of our Organization and generations of Pan-Africanists who dreamt and worked for a strong, unified continent, at peace with itself and the rest of the world.

This extra-ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government provides us with the unique opportunity to take decisive action to strengthen the capacity of our continental organization to enable it play its role in accordance with our vision for a strong and united continent. As Secretary General of this Organization, I take particular pride in the renewed interest that our Leaders are showing in the work of our Organization as evidenced by the very enriching discussions that took place recently in Algiers and the able and dynamic leadership provided by the Current Chairman in the follow-up to the Summit's decisions, and as demonstrated by the participation of so many Heads of State and Government in this Summit. This renewed enthusiasm is a clear indication of the will

of the African Leaders to see to it that the Organization is endowed with the necessary capacities to discharge its responsibilities more effectively, to enable it to continue to be relevant to the people of Africa bearing in mind the new realities on the continent and the challenges posed by globalization. It is also an illustration of their desire to build a strong and viable organization that should remain the symbol and concrete expression of the unity and solidarity of our people.