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STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
AT THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL MEETING
OF THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE ON LIBERIA

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This Special Conference on Liberia is timely as it is important. The establishment of a democratically elected Government, which came in the wake of an arduous peace process is welcome relief first of all for the people of Liberia, the neighbouring countries of asylum, and to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), without whose commitment to engage, perseverance and sacrifice, this peace could not have been achieved. This great achievement of the Liberian people was also rightly considered as an achievement for the entire Continent of Africa to which the OAU has throughout let its support to ECOWAS. Liberia was for the United-Nations and ECOWAS a testing ground for co-ordination and co-operation in the process of peacekeeping.

I wish to salute ECOWAS for the invaluable efforts that ECOMOG has exerted in helping to bring peace to Liberia. We pay particular tribute to the Office and all ranks of ECOMOG for their crucial role. We pay homage to those who sacrificed their lives contributing to the peace of that country. I also wish to pay tribute to the United Nations and, in particular to the men and women who served in UNOMIL and in the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. I thank them for persevering under difficult conditions. While peace has come to Liberia, Post-conflict Peace-building poses another challenge to all of us, in that Liberia now, needs to rebuild itself, politically, socially, economically and financially.

This Conference is indeed special because it focuses on Post-conflict Peace-building in Liberia. This new challenge of Post-conflict, Peace-building in Liberia, has three dimensions to it. The first is a moral dimension, which addresses itself to the international community for continued relief and humanitarian assistance to the people of Liberia. A people who have started to return to a country badly in need of assistance.

The task of the OAU in this endeavor, is to be supportive of the

- activities that the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies will undertake, in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia. Whatever we can do in terms of the African contribution to these activities, we will do, after all, Liberia is not only a Member State of the OAU, but the oldest Republic in our continent, in this its one hundred and fiftieth year.

The second dimension to the new challenge is a political one. If there is anything that the people of Liberia should learn about the last seven years, and if there is anything that the new government should also learn, is that there is no substitute for political tolerance, dialogue and negotiations. The consolidation of the peace process in Liberia, therefore has to be an ongoing undertaking. The peace process had not ended with the election of a new Government. It is as a continuing process, for which the leadership in Liberia has, both moral and political responsibility. I am gratified that President Charles Taylor has himself underscored the importance of national reconciliation in rebuilding the country. President Taylor's commitment to the safeguarding of human rights augurs very well for the future of that country.

The third dimension is an economic one, for which the Liberian people must work hard for, with the assistance of the International Community. This would require the full involvement of not only the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations, but also, the multilateral financial institutions, in particular, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank.

We have taken note that the World Bank, IMF and African Development bank fielded a joint mission to Liberia, just last month. We are encouraged that the mission discussed critical, political and economic issues with the new Government, issues such as:

- The post-electoral political and security situation in the country;
- The measures in place to consolidate democracy;
- The need for Institutional capacity-building at both the central and local governments levels;
- The adoption of macro-economic reforms, including measures

that are geared towards improving the business environment;

- Discussion of Liberia's external indebtedness, and plans for restoring the country's credit worthiness, and
- The reconstruction and recovery framework as well as the planning process in that country.

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia would require not only the injection of massive external assistance, but also, the active and total involvement of all the Liberian people, under the leadership of the Government of President Charles Taylor.

It is incumbent therefore upon all of us to mobilize the International Community to act, and to do so in timely manner, so that the hard-won peace in Liberia can be consolidated, and in the process give peace a good chance, in that country.

I hope that this Conference will recognize the historic opportunity that is at hand and that the World Community would not fail the Liberian People.