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ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM AT THE CLOSING SESSION  
OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE ECOWAS  
COMMITTEE OF NINE ON LIBERIA  
ACCRA - MAY 8, 1996

Your Excellency President J.J. Rawlings, Head of State of Ghana  
and current Chairman of ECOWAS,

Your Excellency President Ahmad Tejan KABBAH of Sierra Leone

Your Excellency Prof. Wilton SANKAWULO, Chairman of the Council  
of State of the Liberia National Transitional Government,

Distinguished Heads of Delegation,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Ministerial Meeting of the Committee of Nine has taken place in a crisis atmosphere. The tragic developments that have occurred in the last four weeks in Liberia have saddened and outraged us all. The killings, destruction and mayhem that the city of Monrovia has experienced since April 6 stagger our imagination. What is particularly painful in these events is that Monrovia was for a long time, subsequent to the deployment of ECOMOG, considered a safe haven. It is all the more regrettable that these developments have taken place at a time when there was great expectation for a return to peace, security

and stability in the aftermath of the Abuja Agreement. That Agreement of August, 1995 constituted a very sound framework for an end to the conflict in Liberia. The OAU welcomed the Abuja Agreement. Indeed the OAU, through its Eminent Person, President Canaan Banana, has made its own contribution working with the leaders of the region and the leaders of the various factions of Liberia in the various efforts and negotiations culminating those at Abuja aimed at resolving the conflict in Liberia.

The Abuja Agreement provided for the basic essentials toward peace. These elements include establishment of a cease-fire, disarmament, encampment, demobilisation of fighters and the holding of elections which will enable the people of Liberia to decide the Government of their choice. But the events after Abuja notwithstanding the initial genuine euphoria which accompanied the installation of the Council of State have by and large been a disappointment and more recently very distressing. There has been no movement as far as disarmament, encampment and demobilisation is concerned. Indeed even partial proportional disarmament has not been achieved - not even seriously attempted. It is also looking less and less likely that elections will take place within the time frame envisaged by the Abuja Agreement ... and to compound it all we have the tragic events of the last four weeks.

It is against this background that this seventh meeting of the Committee of Nine has taken place. Its timeliness cannot be

overemphasised. I wish to pay tribute to the Government of Ghana for having taken the initiative to convene this meeting. I also wish to register our appreciation for the efforts that President J.J. Rawlings and the Government of Ghana have deployed towards the promotion of peace in Liberia. Africa and world attention is today focused on Accra.

In my view this meeting in the course of its deliberations needed to answer two fundamental questions. First, what has gone wrong. Why has the Abuja Agreement not been implemented? Second, given the current crisis in Liberia, what needs to be done and what can be done?

In making a realistic assessment of the situation in Liberia with a view to charting the way forward, our point of departure must as always be the role of the Liberian people themselves and in this particular respect the role of their leaders. Why is it that despite the commitment of the faction leaders in Abuja the Liberian Peace Process has been derailed. Why is it, for example, they have not taken concrete measures towards disarmament? Why is it that no concrete steps have been taken to realize even partial disarmament? Why is it they have allowed the country's capital to incur such massive destruction and force thousands of their people to flee for their lives. Leadership presupposes responsibility. The Liberian leaders cannot be exonerated from responsibility for the present tragedy.

Under the Abuja Agreement the important role of ECOMOG has been clearly recognised and stressed. Yet ECOMOG has not been given the requisite resources to function as an effective, credible and efficient Peacekeeping Force. Why is this so? In particular, why has the international community failed to respond adequately to the many appeals of ECOWAS, the OAU and the UN? In the circumstances is it not justifiable to hold the view that the lack of resolve on the part of the international community has been fully exploited by those in Liberia who wish to see the perpetuation of chaos and anarchy?

We are encouraged by the concerns demonstrated by many nations of the world. We welcome their pledges, albeit thus far mostly unfulfilled, to provide humanitarian and related assistance to Liberia. But clearly the first order of business in Liberia right now is the restoration of peace and security. For how can refugees and displaced persons go back to their homes in conditions where unnatural death is a constant possibility. We must therefore as a matter of urgency put an end to the fighting and to strive for the implementation of the Abuja Agreement. To achieve this we must ensure that ECOMOG is properly equipped and adequately provided.

Mr. Chairman, the immediate challenge is the attainment and consolidation of a durable cease-fire in Monrovia. That nation's capital must be made secure. It must be a safe haven for all Liberians. All armed elements belonging to different factions



must be withdrawn from Monrovia. The leaders of Liberia have a duty to their people, to Africa and the world at large to see to it that this is done without equivocation and prevarication. The leaders of Liberia must develop a greater faith in a negotiated settlement as opposed to military might. They must demonstrate more tolerance to each other. Above all they must move away from the present path which has brought suffering and disaster to their people.

I know and share in the legitimate frustrations of the countries of the region especially those who have contributed troops. These countries have made great sacrifices in the efforts to restore peace. Some of their sons have paid the ultimate price. But in the name of the Organisation of African Unity, I appeal to them all to continue to persevere so that we can all see the day when the people of Liberia, especially the very vulnerable ones - the children, women and the aged are spared the agony and suffering of this protracted conflict. The OAU for its part will continue to support the efforts of ECOWAS towards this objective. In this regard it is worthwhile noting that in addition to the diplomatic efforts made by our continental organisation in support of ECOWAS, we have also made a financial contribution to ECOWAS to assist ECOMOG operations. It is furthermore my intention to strongly recommend to the relevant organs of our organization that the OAU, as a practical demonstration of its faith in, and support of the ECOWAS efforts,

should continue to make financial contributions to ECOMOG notwithstanding the serious budgetary constraints confronting us.

Mr. Chairman, I now wish to address a particular appeal to the international community. Since it is generally accepted that a strengthened and effective ECOMOG is essential for the maintenance of peace and security in Liberia and for the creation of appropriate conditions for the implementation of the Abuja Agreement, I urge them to be forthcoming in providing the much needed assistance. ECOMOG needs to be strengthened qualitatively and quantitatively. It needs better equipment and logistical support. It needs both resources and additional manpower. Only a strengthened and credibly effective ECOMOG can serve as a serious deterrent. It is also important that ECOMOG should be given greater control over resources placed at its disposal by the international community on the clear understanding that there will be transparency and accountability on how these resources are used.

I wish to stress that ECOMOG must be strengthened and equipped to do the job. It is self evident that if this is not done then the option of reconsidering its continued role, dismal and catastrophic as that may be could develop as a stark reality. I submit that this must be avoided.

While we make appeals to the international community it is imperative that the leaders of the Liberian factions demonstrate

by word and deed that, that support will not be misused or plundered. In this respect I wish to add my voice to the call of the Ministerial Committee of Nine for the return of vehicles and equipment seized or looted from UNOMIL, humanitarian agencies and NGOs. It is obvious that future humanitarian and reconstruction assistance would be jeopardized if the liberian leaders fail to demonstrate good faith by making serious efforts to retrieve these assets.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies Heads of State and Heads of Delegation, the solution to the Liberian crisis depends on a strong partnership between the people of Liberia and their leaders, Africa especially through the efforts of ECOWAS, supported by the OAU and the international community especially the United Nations. Each element of this triage has an important role to play. Obviously the most important role is that of the Liberian people themselves. For peace cannot be imposed on Liberia. It is up to the parties in conflict to recognize the anachronism and futility of the path of confrontation. Africa through ECOWAS and with the firm support of the OAU has eloquently demonstrated its commitment to assist. The response of the international community has unfortunately not been commensurate with the requirements of the situation. It is our earnest hope that this will change. For the conflict in Liberia also represents a larger issue. It represents a test case on how serious is the international community in its many declarations



of being prepared to assist Africa in resolving some of the burning conflicts that presently rage in our continent.

Mr. Chairman, almost six years ago - in August, 1990, a decision was made to deploy ECOMOG. I was privileged to have been present in Banjul, the Gambia and to have taken active part as OAU Secretary-General in the deliberations leading to that historic decision. I considered it then to be one of Africa's finest hours. The efforts deployed by ECOMOG on the ground as well as the diplomatic efforts made by the ECOWAS countries under the leadership of successive ECOWAS Chairmen have served to strengthen my conviction on the timeliness and exceptional significance of that decision notwithstanding the problems encountered and the obstacles confronted.

As we view the present crisis in Liberia, I am confident that our leaders under the able, dynamic and wise chairmanship of the current Chairman of ECOWAS, President J.J. Rawlings, will take up the challenge. Through cooperation and coordination as well as enhanced harmonisation of your collective efforts and with the cooperation of the Liberian people and its leaders, a new chapter can be written in Africa's role and commitment to contain, manage and resolve conflicts in our continent. Naturally we expect and are entitled to the understanding, support and solidarity of the international community.

I thank you.