

22



Organization of African Unity

**NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

December 28, 1998

## **Fellow Africans,**

In a couple of days, the year 1998 will come to an end. As I convey my heartfelt wishes for good health, wellbeing and prosperity to my fellow Africans, my thoughts are first and foremost with our brothers and sisters who have gone through yet another very difficult year. Indeed, in 1998, millions of our people continued to live an unenviable life of exile, as refugees and displaced persons. They have been forced to leave their homes and countries out of fear for their lives or in the search for survival, thus exposing themselves to the vagaries and uncertainties of such a fate. Millions more have been suffering from various diseases some of which are of epidemic proportions. The overwhelming majority of our people continued to experience the agony of poverty, with its attendant repercussions of unemployment, inadequate shelter, lack of education and malnutrition.

During the year, many of our people have also suffered from abuse of their basic rights and from the consequences of intolerance, extremism, and terrorism. The sad and revolting images of the bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and in other parts of the continent are still vivid in our memories. They remind us of the need for decisive and concerted international response to put an end to these barbaric acts and combat this scourge of terrorism. Furthermore, a large segment of our people, mainly women and children, have been caught up as victims of the many conflicts afflicting our continent. Indeed, in Somalia, Burundi, Angola, Western Sahara, Southern Sudan, Comoros, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of Congo, precious lives have been lost; unnecessary suffering has been imposed on our people, and considerable destruction and damage has been inflicted on our societies. And as if these are not enough, there are still other crises that are looming in other parts of the continent, such as the escalation of rebel attacks in Sierra Leone and the disturbing developments in the Republic of Congo. In sum this has been a very difficult and turbulent year for our continent in so far as our quest for peace, stability and security is concerned.

At the same time however, 1998 has not been only a year of problems and calamities. It also has been a year of modest achievements and progress. On the economic front, and despite an unfavourable international economic environment, many of our countries have registered positive results, including encouraging improvements in GDP growth and in Per Capita Incomes. In the area of economic cooperation and integration, significant efforts have been made, particularly in some of the African regions, towards policy harmonization and coordination. These efforts need to be nurtured and consolidated to produce maximum benefit.

In general, our people at grassroots and at the leadership level, have exerted relentless efforts towards political and economic transformation. The private sector has become more involved and dynamic. This trend needs to be further encouraged in order to complement the role of the State in promoting socio-economic development. Significant reforms are being implemented to enable African economies to provide for the needs of our people and to compete in the global economy.

In addressing the scourge of conflict, African leaders and other concerned Africans have spared no effort in promoting peaceful solutions to the various crises in the continent. At the core of these efforts has been our Continental Organization, which worked hand in hand with African Regional Organizations, the United Nations, and the larger international community to ensure that the necessary attention and focus is given to the primary issue of peace, security and stability. It was in that context that tireless efforts have been deployed and will continue to be deployed to seek peaceful solutions to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and to the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as to the latest crisis in the Comoros.

At the same time, important steps continue to be taken to promote human rights, good governance, and a culture of democracy in our continent. These steps are fully supported by civic organizations, which should be encouraged in their endeavours to promote the interests of the civil society. There has been also a greater realization on the need to promote unity, cohesion and harmony within and between our societies, based on mutual respect and in a spirit of tolerance and accommodation.

I do recognize that these efforts aimed at inculcating a culture of peace, tolerance and democracy within our societies are still fragile; but what is encouraging, however, is that there is an ardent desire and determination to sustain and strengthen them.

As we are coming to the end of 1998, and as we are entering the New Year, I fervently hope we will draw lessons from the unfortunate experiences of the past and mobilize the necessary energy and commitment to meet the challenges ahead. In doing so, we should draw inspiration from the achievements made, despite the many difficulties encountered.

In counting on our own resolve and commitment, let us endeavour to make 1999 a better year for our people. Let us strive to take even bolder and more imaginative steps towards attaining the much needed peace in the continent. Indeed, we urgently need to break with the vicious cycle of conflicts and violence in our continent. Only through peace, security and

stability can we ensure that the energies and resources of our people are released, harnessed and channeled towards overcoming the pressing issues of poverty and under-development. We can best attain this objective by working together as Africans, in unity and solidarity.

Once again, I wish you all a peaceful and prosperous 1999.