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Organization of African Unity

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

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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## **Fellow Africans,**

1996 proved to be a very difficult and trying year for Africa. Despite the tremendous amount of energy that our people and governments deployed in 1996, the vagaries of poverty and under-development and the tragedies arising from natural and man-made disasters continued to haunt the continent.

Indeed and although a number of our countries witnessed an overall improvement in their economic growth, the socio-economic performance of the Continent, as a whole, has been poor in 1996. The standard of living of our people continued to deteriorate as a result of increasing poverty in our continent and declining social and health conditions of the people in general.

This situation was further compounded by the continued conflicts that have torn apart many of our societies, thus seriously undermining our efforts aimed at socio-economic development. Carnage and horrors continued to resurface in parts of the continent. We have all been hurt by the continued violence and bloodshed and flagrant violations of human rights in our continent as evidenced in Liberia, Burundi and Somalia and elsewhere in Africa. We have all been pained by the immense suffering of millions of our brothers and sisters in the Great Lakes Region and by the humanitarian tragedy which is still prevailing there. The situation in Zaire

Most of the problems we faced were of our own making. But they were exacerbated by other factors of external dimension. Indeed, the international environment was not the most conducive in support of Africa's efforts to address its own problems.

As we are entering a new year, we should commit ourselves to work harder towards achieving peace and development in our continent. We should exert more determined efforts to address the scourge of conflicts. The recent Peace Agreement in Sierra Leone gives us hope that peace is not unachievable in some of our conflict-torn countries when there is the determination and the political will on the part of the parties in the conflict. We also hope that the momentum for peace will be sustained in Liberia and in Angola so that the people of these countries could engage in national reconciliation and much needed reconstruction. It is also our fervent hope that the faction leaders in Somalia will seize the opportunity in 1997 to stand above their clannish and personal divisions and rivalries and rise to the challenge of peace and national reconciliation. It is also our hope that the people of Burundi and especially their leaders will rise to the challenge of bringing an end to the fratricidal conflict and engage in serious negotiations aimed at bringing new political dispensation which guarantees justice, fairness and equality on the basis of democratic principles and security for all.

continent especially at a time when all factors tend to reinforce the need for such unity and solidarity. African States should not allow ourselves to be divided at the time when others are forging ahead in unity and strength. Indeed, we should not allow artificial differences to take root amongst us. We should build ahead on our common values and heritage with confidence and pride. We should remember that Africa's voice has always been strongest when Africans closed their ranks and acted in unity and cohesion. We should be inspired by the strength we found in unity and how we were able to confront the challenges that faced our continent in the past.

Once again, we will need in 1997 to act as Africa and as one.

I wish you all a prosperous and a productive 1997.