

NEW YEAR STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I felt it would be appropriate, on the eve of the New Year, to meet with members of the Press in Addis Ababa.

I would like, from the outset, to extend to you all my most sincere wishes of good health, happiness, success and prosperity in 1992. It is my fervent hope that the New Year will further extend the frontiers of press freedom and freedom of speech in Africa and enable you to operate under better conditions and perform your duty vis-a-vis public opinion in general and the African public opinion in particular.

I also deemed it appropriate to convey, through you, to my African brothers and sisters, my best wishes for the New Year.

As you are aware, our continent witnessed a lot of major events in the course of the year now ending. The economic situation unfortunately has continued to be a source of concern despite the genuine and considerable efforts made by our countries to reverse the trend and commit themselves on the path to recovery and development. The terms of trade continue to operate to the detriment of Africa whose debt burden has attained an unbearable level. Ironically, the net resource flows continue to work to the advantage of the rich developed countries. Furthermore, most of our countries involved in structural adjustment programmes continue to pay the attendant exorbitant price in terms of a social crisis of unprecedented proportions. In addition, some regions of our continent have fallen prey to the endemic plague of drought and famine. The continent has also not been spared the horrors of natural disasters with the destruction and loss of life and property that occur in its wake.

Apart from this disturbing socio-economic crisis, our continent is battling with situations of conflict which drain the meagre resources that are so direly needed by our countries for their economic development. These situations of conflict coupled with their devastating consequences in terms of human casualties and destruction of infrastructure, further widen the split among African brothers and sisters.

I am most disturbed by the fact that at a time when there is a lull in inter-State conflicts - and in this respect, I am pleased to refer to the Senegal/Mauritania case where there is a manifest improvement in relations between the two countries thanks to their genuine commitment to a peaceful resolution of their differences - we are witnessing a worrying trend of conflicts within member States. Such conflicts jeopardize the already fragile unity achieved at great cost, sacrifice and struggle within the countries concerned.

In a continent that is fraught with extreme diversity in terms of culture, creed and race, it is my firm belief that we should be most attentive to cultivating a culture of tolerance grounded on institutions that can accommodate the interests of all segments of the nation. It is with pleasure that I have observed in this respect that member States are increasingly committed to promoting national cohesion and dialogue.

One such encouraging example is South Africa. Tomorrow, the Congress for a democratic South Africa will convene to chart the initial steps towards a new democratic, non-racial and united South Africa. While much remains to be done to wrest South Africa from the grip of apartheid, I am encouraged by what has been achieved so far. The priority task ahead is for the international

community to continue exerting pressure so as to ensure that the process of change is kept on course and that the dialogue on transitional arrangements and ultimately a permanent settlement is sustained. A new South Africa, liberated from the oppression of the apartheid system, will be an important addition to the African ranks.

I am however very concerned about the situation in Somalia and the senseless blood-letting in Mogadishu. I have, on more than one occasion, appealed to the parties in conflict to exercise restraint and a sense of leadership and embark on dialogue. I have also offered the good offices of the continental organization in this respect. I would again like to seize this opportunity to reiterate my appeal and a solemn request for an immediate cease-fire and an end to the carnage in Mogadishu.

Although our continent continues to face serious economic and political problems, there is still some cause for hope and optimism. Firstly, there is an increasing desire among our countries and peoples to pool their efforts and work together. This desire was clearly demonstrated during the last Summit in Abuja (Nigeria) where the Heads of State and Government, on behalf of their peoples, decided to act together within the framework of an African Economic Community. We look forward to the speedy ratification of this important and fundamental instrument so that in 1992 we can seriously embark on the implementation of the Treaty. This is definitely one area of hope which, if addressed with the seriousness it deserves, could enable Africa to forge ahead in its efforts of recovery and development.



Another area of hope lies in the increasing involvement of our people in the process of economic development and political decision-making. The legitimate quest for greater involvement is healthy and should be addressed as it cannot be separated from the aspirations of our people for freedom and dignity which started way back in the days of the struggle for the political emancipation of our continent. This quest for greater democratization and for the promotion of human rights is therefore a welcome development.

Although, the principles of democracy are universal in character, we cannot over-emphasize the fact that there is no recipe applicable to every society. The modalities, time frame and pace of change depend on the peculiarities of each society and country. In this respect, the efforts presently being deployed within our continent should be commended and encouraged. It is my firm belief however, that every effort should be made to ensure that this process is carried through in an orderly manner so that national cohesion and unity are not placed in jeopardy. We must always and in every circumstance bear in mind that our greatest challenge is to set up an institutional framework that strikes a balance between the overall interest of the nation and the specific concerns of its constituent groups. Greater priority should always be accorded to dialogue and togetherness rather than to division and its attendant corollary of chaos, violence and anarchy. Our continent, which has paid a heavy price for its political emancipation, cannot afford to wallow in chaos.

In this respect, it is my prayer that in 1992, proper leadership and sense of responsibility are exercised by our leaders and the necessary restraint demonstrated by our people so that the process of change now underway is carried through in the spirit of harmony, unity and national concord.

I would like to conclude by appealing to the rich developed countries to demonstrate greater solidarity towards Africa in her efforts to achieve economic recovery and development. I would also like to call for greater solidarity and cohesion among our Member States and our people. It is only in this manner that Africa can be relevant in a changing world. It is also in this manner that Africa can occupy the position it deserves in the affairs of the world. The election of one of its eminent sons to the helm of the United Nations Secretariat is a clear demonstration of what Africa can achieve if it decides to speak with one voice, pool its efforts and forge cohesion within its ranks.

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