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Organization of African Unity

NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY H.E. DR. SALIM A. SALIM,  
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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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## **My Fellow Africans,**

As the year 1995 comes to a close, we look back through the last twelve months with serious concern at the many problems which continue to plague our countries and people. Conflicts in various parts of Africa continue with their devastating consequences to human lives, property, infrastructure and even the environment. Conflicts have continued to breed refugees and displaced persons and sowed the seeds of a deepening culture of violence among our populations especially the youth. The specter of the child soldiers, whose opportunities to grow up and play like innocent children have decimated as they have been drafted and thrown into the merciless and cruel life of war.

We continue to see mothers who are caught behind combat lines and have become victims of the failure of political accommodation and dialogue in our societies. We equally continue to see men who are consumed by the blind ambitions of power and have led their societies into wars and destruction.

But we have also seen a determined effort to put an end to these destructive wars and we end the year with optimism that peace is not only desirable but possible. We have seen the gradual healing of Rwanda and the new opening for peace in Liberia. Somalia and Burundi remain precarious but the OAU continues to be committed to helping the people in these countries put an end to the process of self-destruction. We have equally seen slow but steady progress of Angola towards peace and the consolidation of democracy and National Unity in both Mozambique and South Africa. The Comoros too is showing some signs of emerging out of its present political and constitutional crisis.

The process of democratization is gaining root as our countries have continued along the road of political pluralism and multiparty elections. Again the OAU is pleased to have been allowed to continue being associated with the process of building democracy in the continent through our observation of the elections.

In the last year, we have also seen the consolidation of the economic reform programs in the Continent. And while these reforms have caused immense social hardships to the people, our Governments persist in the conviction that ultimately, there is no alternative to bringing about growth and development but to go through the full scale of these reforms. Happily, we are beginning to see modest results of those austerity programs. The generalized economic down spiral of the last decade has been arrested and the first signs of a return to economic growth can now be seen. Of course, these reforms, including economic liberalization are creating pockets of disproportionate wealth, and of poverty in our societies. There is need therefore to ensure social balance so that economic polarization which could eventually arise from this asymmetrical growth of wealth and poverty, does not undermine the reforms themselves as well as peace and harmony of our societies in the long run.

But it is a fact that whatever our countries may be doing individually, they will not make greater meaning to the Continent unless, ultimately, they are done collectively at the continental level. The year now ending has seen steady progress towards the building of the African Economic Community. We need to redouble our efforts at integration both at sub-regional and continental level and gradually bring all our efforts to converge into the common enterprise of the Pan-African Economic Community which our present and future generations need.

The dream of the development of Africa is not unreal. Africa can and will develop. We have the human and natural resources necessary to develop. Other countries elsewhere in the world which were poor less than three decades ago, and without comparable resources, have been able to emerge from the oppression of extreme poverty and under-development. In the formative years following independence, our countries may not have made the right policy decisions all the time. Now there is clear evidence that the right economic policy decisions are being

made. The combination of our hardworking population, our human and material resources as well as the generally sound policies now in place, should be able to impact positively our economic development ambitions.

But, for Africa to concentrate its time, effort, mind and resources fully, to the challenge of development, it must create the enabling environment. We all know that conflicts and wars have been the most responsible in undermining the environment conducive to sustained economic activity and development. The lack of peace has done the most to perpetuate the image of Africa as a continent condemned to instability and one unprepared for long term economic commitment in terms of investment. And this applies both to local and foreign investment. If therefore we are to inspire our local entrepreneurs, as well as those foreign to invest in Africa, we must first invest in peace and security.

We have to do it in our individual countries and among our nations. The Organization of African Unity has taken the challenge of peace seriously. And while conflicts still rage on in some parts of Africa, the Organization is doing its utmost through the instrumentality of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, to help end the present conflicts. Whether in Somalia, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone or in Rwanda, we see compelling need to persist in our efforts to bring those in conflict in sustainable dialogue, and to lasting political solution.

As we assist, we also realize that ultimately peace can be made by those in conflict themselves. The OAU can and will continue to assist to promote dialogue and reconciliation in those areas in conflict, but we cannot pretend to have the ability to impose peace on anyone. The rest of the world may have the option to step aside and leave Africa to its own devices. The OAU cannot. We are inextricably linked to those conflicts both by our kinship to those who are victims and physical proximity to them. These conflicts affect each of us. They destroy our environment,

they breed refugees for whom we have to care. These conflicts hold us back in our poverty and insecurity. This is why we must continue to insist that those in conflict are not only harming themselves, they are harming Africa as a whole. They have a responsibility to themselves as they do to the rest of the continent.

We all know that by far, the most responsible for the internal conflicts in Africa, has been the lack of acceptable mechanisms within society for accommodation, mutual respect and tolerance as well as for equitable power sharing. I am glad that the need to create and consolidate these mechanisms is now understood in most of Africa. The evidence of this is exemplified by the realism which our governments have displayed in dealing with the question of further democratization of our societies. We see Governments more willing to support the cause of democracy through multiparty elections.



We see people more confident and prepared to challenge Governments, and the political leadership generally. We see an increasingly politically conscious public, prepared to demand its rights, to speak against violations of human rights, challenging politics of exclusion. We see it from Algeria to South Africa, from Dar es Salaam to Dakar. It is a continent which has again come alive.

Beyond this resurgence of political activism we still have lingering legacies of the past which hold our societies in division and at conflict. We see also the emergence along this new political awareness, ugly politics of religious extremism, of tribalism including clannism and sadly as was the case in Rwanda, of genocide. As we nurture and consolidate democracy, we should also fight these divisive and conflict engendering politics. We should fight all forms of intolerance and exclusivism as we should at the same time promote mutual respect, accommodation and dialogue within our societies.

For ultimately if we manage to consolidate democracy, to instill a culture of tolerance and institutionalize mechanisms for equity in resource distribution and power sharing, we shall have erected foundations upon which enduring peace and stability in the Continent will rest.

The year 1995 is ending without the end to the conflicts in our Continent, or to the economic problems which we face. Yet, it is ending largely on a note of optimism. We see a determined Africa, ready to face its problems more resolutely and one which is no longer looking at the outside world for excuses or to rationalize its mistakes and non-performance. We see an Africa determined to endure hardships, in order to lay ground for long term economic growth and development. We see governments committed to pursue economic reforms vigorously even at great political risks.

At the political front we are witnessing a rebirth of democratic fervor in our countries. We see a Continent that is even more determined to work hand in hand to bring an end to the scourge of conflicts. To sum we see a Continent resolute and determined, one gradually rekindling belief in itself and its abilities, and one no longer willing to succumb to the fatalism of misplaced and prejudiced notions of Afro-pessimism.

Africa needs to continue along this path of renewal and consolidation. But we can do so most effectively if we invest more in peace, if we rededicate ourselves to peace within our societies and within our Continent; if we recommit ourselves to the promotion of mutual respect, of political accommodation, of respect for human rights, of dialogue and of the culture of tolerance.

We have seen what lack of these have done to our people, how much suffering they have caused our nations and how much destruction they have brought about.

As we end this year and in the spirit of love and kindness, embodied in the joy of this festive season, let us welcome the new year with a recommitment to peace. Let 1996 be the year of tolerance and peace in our Continent.

**Addis Ababa, December 22, 1995.**