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Organization of African Unity

STATEMENT OF H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU ON THE OCCASION OF
THE NINETEENTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE OAU
LABOUR COMMISSION

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

19 April 1996

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency, Dr. Kebede Tadesse, Minister in charge
of Social and Administrative Sub-Sector, Prime
Minister's Office,

Mr. Amoako, Executive Secretary of the ECA and Under
Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Mr. Elias G. Mabere, Assistant Director-General responsible
for ILO Activities in Africa,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasant duty to address this august gathering
on the occasion of the Nineteenth Ordinary Session of the
OAU Labour Commission. I should, at the outset, like to
welcome you all to Addis Ababa, the Headquarters of our
Organization. I also wish to pay special tribute to and
thank the Government and People of Ethiopia for hosting
this Conference and for the arrangements made to facilitate
the convening of the Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

This Session of your Commission is taking place at a
time when our Continent is facing monumental challenges of
political and socio-economic nature. Some of these
challenges are reflected in the Agenda of your Nineteenth
Session.

I understand that you will discuss, among others, such serious issues of concern to the OAU and its Member States, including women's access to employment, Sustaining the Mid-Decade Goals for Child Survival, and the Implementation of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community.

As we are all aware, women constitute over 50 per cent of the African population, and more than 25 per cent of households in many African countries are headed by women. The central role and importance of women in socio-economic development need not be over-emphasized. They should therefore be the critical constituency to be given priority attention and treatment in the recovery and development efforts of our Continent as it is clear that there can be no meaningful or sustainable development in Africa without the active, full and effective participation of women. I wish here to underline the importance the OAU and I personally attach to the enhancement of the role of women in society in general and in socio-economic development in particular. It is my confident hope that your meeting will give special attention to this gender issue in the socio-economic development in our Continent. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to appeal to Member States to implement

the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in general, and the 16 critical areas of concern, in particular.

Another important item on your agenda is the assessment of the achievements made in sustaining the Mid-Decade Goals for Child Survival, Protection and Development. As it is well-known, capacity-building and human resources development are crucial to our Continent's recovery and development. It is therefore of cardinal importance to invest in our children by ensuring that they enjoy good health from infancy to adulthood so as to prepare and equip them to face the challenges of the future with confidence.

The Commission will also deliberate on what I consider to be one of the crucial issues on Africa's agenda : the implementation of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. As it is clearly demonstrated by experience in other regions of the world, Africa's economic, social and political survival will largely depend on how effective and seriously the Continent takes the agenda for regional socio-economic cooperation and integration. Hence,

African countries need to pull their energies and resources together and forge ahead with determination and resolve to build a future together.

Mr. Chairman,

As your Commission is deliberating on these matters as contained in its agenda, I would like to recognize the importance of consolidating working relations and cooperation with the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), the Pan-African Employers Confederation (PEC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). In the light of the new challenges facing the world in general and our Continent in particular, I see the need for our institutions to review their working relations with the objective of adjusting them to meet the demands and aspirations of our people.

I would therefore like to urge our institutions to join their efforts in addressing one of the scourges which is undermining the very fabric of our societies. This is the crisis of unemployment in our Continent. I know that there are no ready-made recipes for solving this problem. I also

know that our African economies cannot, at the moment, generate sufficient employment to cope with the growing demand.

I believe however, that through concerted efforts and exchange of experiences and cooperation, solutions could be found to alleviate the burden of unemployment on the Continent. This task is all the more urgent and crucial if we want to combat the disturbing phenomenon of drug abuse, violence and politics of exclusion which are exacerbated by unemployment. At the time when our Continent needs all its resources and energies to sustain the battle of reconstruction and development, this task of addressing unemployment should be the business of all of us.

In this battle I wish to single out the role of the workers who despite difficult conditions have been performing their duties with dedication and commitment. I wish in particular to pay tribute to the workers in conflict situations who are making great sacrifices and living in very hazardous situations. At the same time as your Commission will be seized of the issue of the conditions of the Libyan workers, I would like to express our solidarity

with the Libyan workers and Libyan people in general, at a time when they are facing serious hardship and difficulties as a result of the UN embargo. It is the fervent hope of the OAU that the UN Security Council will reconsider its position in view of the positive response and flexibility shown by Libya, which has accepted to hand over the two suspects for trial on a neutral venue.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I wish to request your Commission to take this opportunity to reflect on how its partners could make their contribution to the advancement of the cause of peace, security, stability and development on our Continent. I am sure you all join me in rejecting the mood of afro-pessimism which is prevailing in some quarters in the world. We are all disturbed by the poor image of our Continent as portrayed by the international media. Yes, we do have problems. Yes, we do recognize the seriousness and the gravity of the socio-economic situation on the Continent. There is no need to describe here in detail the poor performance of our economies. All of you are familiar with the magnitude of the socio-economic crisis on the Continent.

But at the same time, Africa is deploying considerable efforts in addressing its problems. Africa has clearly defined its priorities and its development goals. Our countries have embarked on reforms aimed at improving the performance of their economies and at adjusting to the new global changes. Africa has also taken up the challenge of the economic cooperation and integration through the establishment of the African Economic Community. We have also equipped ourselves to confront the task of promoting peace, security and stability on the Continent through the establishment of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Furthermore, the Continent has committed itself with courage and determination to pursue the course of democratization in Africa.

All these developments constitute a significant progress on which we should build ahead. It is a monumental task which needs the support and contribution of all the forces on our Continent, particularly the forces represented in your Commission. I believe therefore that your Commission should take the challenge of mobilizing and

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galvanising these forces in the service of the cause of peace and socio-economic progress on the Continent.

I wish you successful deliberations.