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REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU ON DEVELOPMENTS  
IN SOMALIA AT A MEETING OF THE AFRICAN AMBASSADORS/HEADS OF MISSION  
DURING THE FIFTY-SEVENTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON ADMINISTRATIVE, BUDGETARY AND FINANCIAL MATTERS  
Monday, November 16, 1992

Mr. Chairman,

I wish now to ask for your indulgence to speak on some disturbing developments pertaining to the question of Somalia.

We are all painfully aware of the continuing unfolding tragedy in that country. As we meet here, hundreds of our brothers and sisters continue to die daily of starvation. Violence, lawlessness and insecurity continue to be the order of the day. And we have all been following the developments on the ship which has left Somalia several days ago on its way to Yemen with more than 2000 Somali refugees who are reportedly in very miserable conditions.

Mr. Chairman,

Perhaps no single question reverberates or echoes louder than of "What has the OAU done in Somalia? Some have even accused our Organization of not having done anything. It is obviously untrue that the OAU has done nothing to help. It is very gratuitous indeed for anyone to suggest that we have been indifferent to the plight and acute suffering of our brothers and sisters there. On the contrary, the OAU was the first Organization, over one year and a half ago, to raise alarm and warn the world of a human tragedy which was unfolding there. We called for urgent humanitarian assistance in the form of food and medicine even before the generalized conflict

which erupted in Mogadiscio last year. As far back as December last year, I tried to send a special representative to consult with the leaders of the various factions in Mogadiscio on what the OAU could do to assist. Unfortunately, the Mission had to turn back in Nairobi after having failed to get the understanding and agreement of General Aideed to the visit.

In the meantime and in the face of what was still then clearly, lack of enthusiasm on the part of the United Nations to get involved in a meaningful way in Somalia, the OAU was partly instrumental in getting the Security Council to redirect its attention to the need of addressing itself to the tragedy there.

We were subsequently encouraged by the ceasefire which we helped negotiate and which has until now made it possible for the International Community to respond with increased humanitarian assistance. Of course I continue to be concerned at the continued prevalence of insecurity even with the added United Nations Security presence. I am equally concerned that while some progress is being made in providing humanitarian relief - thanks to the courageous work being done by Organizations such as UNICEF, OXFAM, Save the Children Fund, CARE, Medicins Sans Frontier, the ICRC and others at great risk, progress in the political area remains minimal. The position of the factions remains far apart and divisions are getting deeper. Reported renewed fighting and increasing opposition to the UN Security presence, does not auger well with prospects for an early end to the conflict.

The OAU has, from the initial period at the Djibouti Conference, expressed its readiness to assist in the promotion of a peaceful political settlement. We have offered our services to help and conveyed our disposition to all the factions and in particular to Mr. Ali Mahdi and General Aideed. The Ali Mahdi faction has been generally favourable to an OAU role while the faction of General Aideed has persistently opposed the OAU accusing it of partiality in the Conflict.

If I have decided to speak about Somalia today, it is because the situation is assuming disturbing proportions. General Aideed's hostility to the OAU is not new. He has manifested this on several occasions. So have some of his collaborators.

It would appear that General Aideed's specific grudge against the OAU is two fold. On the one hand, he blames the Secretariat and the Secretary General for recognizing the Interim Government and allowing it to participate in the meetings of the Organization. On the other, he alleges that the OAU policy on Somalia is dictated by Amb. Osman and that as long as he remains an Assistant Secretary General, the Organization can not play a neutral role.

Unfortunately, what General Aideed conveniently misses out of these his two complaints is that the Secretariat and indeed the Secretary General have nothing to do with the decision to sit the Mahdi's interim government in the OAU meetings or the election of Ambassador Osman. These are decisions of Member States. At any rate, if for example the sitting of the Interim Government is the basis for disallowing the OAU a role in the resolution of the Somali conflict, why does Aideed not argue the same with regard to the Arab League, the Islamic Conference or the Non-Aligned Movement for that matter? In all these Organizations, the Interim Government continues to be seated as representing the continuity of Somalia as a state.

Yet despite this posture adopted by General Aideed's faction, I continued to believe that it was essentially a question of misunderstanding and that in time General Aideed and his colleagues will understand better the position of our Organization and its working methods. I continued to take that position when I got communications which were outrightly hostile. I refer in particular to the communication by Mr. Mohamed H. Awale, Assistant to General Aideed for International Relations. This letter dated September 20, 1992



was addressed to me as Secretary General. But we never received it here in Addis Ababa. I was only given a copy from UN Sources in New York when I was there at the end of September during the General Assembly. For the benefit of the Member States of our Organization, let me quote the contents of that letter which will give you an idea of the difficult environment with which the General Secretariat has had to operate in dealing with General Aideed's faction. I quote from Mr. Awale's letter:

"Dear Mr. Secretary General,

We have been deeply disturbed by the decision to seat Omar Arte Galib at the OAU meeting to represent Somalia. We find unconvincing your explanations that the seating was a routine matter consistent with the Abuja decision and that we had come late with our challenge.

This is an added insult to the injury already inflicted on our country by allowing such criminal individuals like Arte to represent it, who, incidently, escaped abroad nearly a year ago with large sum of public funds. How matters of such grave consequence can be treated in such casual manner actually defies logic or common sense.

But we hold you personally responsible for all this. And we should at this point inform you that the presence in Somalia of your envoys or representatives of the Secretariat would not serve in the interest of peace and reconciliation and therefore will be excluded from further participation in the peace process in Somalia. This decision will remain in force until you take appropriate steps to meet the requirements listed in the enclosed statment."

Mr. Chairman,

Despite the hostility of General Aideed and the many obstacles his factions has continued to place in our way, the OAU has persevered. I have continued to insist that notwithstanding the position of hostility of General Aideed to the OAU, we nonetheless ought to persist in our efforts. This we have done in the firm belief that the Somali people deserve a reprieve from the present tragic conditions and that nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of constructive action by Africa and the international community in Somalia.

Equally, I strongly believe that the OAU has a particular responsibility to the people of Somalia generally - and that we should not allow that responsibility to be undermined or circumscribed by the unilateralism of an individual or one group of individuals in that country. Consequently we have continued to seek the understanding of General Aideed as well as that of the other factions. We have done so with much caution and discretion and even in the most difficult and frustrating of circumstances, we have remained quiet not wishing to alter the balance of good reason. We have made no public or private utterances regarding those obstacles or what is often an attitude of callous disregard to the suffering and sanctity of human life which some individuals in the Somali factions have demonstrated.

We have preferred to continue urging the various factions to submit to reason and negotiate an end to the conflict. At the same time, we have continued to express the willingness and full disposition of the OAU to do whatever is necessary to promote a peaceful solution to the conflict as we have equally continued to urge the international community for increased humanitarian assistance.

As part of that disposition, the OAU has continued to operate within the Joint UN-OAU-LAS and ICO initiative to promote a peaceful settlement. I have despatched the Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs to Somalia on a couple of occasions and our representative to the Joint Team has been in and out of Somalia over seven times. We have also been in regular contact with the Standing Committee on Somalia of the Countries of the Horn with a view to seeing how we can promote our mutual objective of responding to the acute humanitarian needs of the people there and restoring peace to their unfortunate country. I have also been in contact with President Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, President Daniel Arab Moi of Kenya and President Gouled Aptidon of Djibouti.

Additionally, there have been efforts at the level of the Chairmen of the OAU. President Babangida sent Minister Nwachuku to Somalia early this year and President Diouf also sent Minister Djibo Ka there after the Dakar Summit. On both occasions, the message was simple. The OAU is ready to assist - let it help.

I have personally been involved in countless rounds of consultations with representatives of all the various factions. I did so in Nairobi, here in Addis Ababa, in New York and in many other places whenever an opportunity presented itself. In all these consultations, I have conveyed the message of concern at the plight of the Somali people and the full disposition of the OAU and myself to do whatever is necessary to help end the suffering and promote avenues for peace. I have clearly and persistently reiterated my readiness to travel to Mogadiscio at any time to continue with those contacts especially with Mr. Ali Mahdi and General Aideed.

On a number of occasions we have explored the possibility of logistical support from the United Nations System. In this connection, I was in contact with the then Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Ambassador Sahnoun, as well as with representatives of other institutions such as UNICEF, WFP and the ICRC. We have found all these ready and willing to assist with logistical support into Somalia and within Mogadiscio.



When I was in New York this October, I had a lengthy meeting with senior collaborator of General Aideed in the United States. During the meeting, I made it clear that the overriding interest of the OAU in Somalia is to see to it that suffering ends and peace returns to that country. It is not the business of the OAU to support or oppose any faction there. It is however the firm view of the Organization that the leaders of the various factions have a responsibility of leadership and of putting the interest of the people first. And while the OAU and the world generally can assist in providing humanitarian relief and promoting peaceful settlement, the primary responsibility of ending the conflict rests with the Somalia people and their leaders. In this, we are ready to go into a partnership for peace with everyone. I told General Aideed's representative that the OAU is neutral and only interested in peace. I emphasized that the accusations levelled against the General Secretariat regarding specifically to the sitting of the Interim Government in OAU meetings and the election of Ambassador Osman, were misplaced. These were decisions of the OAU Member States and Mr. Awale - the Special Advisor of General Aideed whom I met in Dakar during the Summit understands the issues involved very well. I reiterated to him my full disposition to travel to Somalia to meet General Aideed and indeed to discuss among other issues, those accusations. The Representative of General Aideed told me that he would communicate the contents of our discussion to General Aideed and then he would revert back to me.

On October 19 this year, the Representative telephoned me here in Addis from Washington informing me that he had conveyed my views to General Aideed, who has understood my position and that of the OAU as well as the context of our participation in the peace efforts. He informed me that General Aideed was ready to meet me whenever I am ready to travel to Somalia. He requested that I should give him an active notice of 4 to 5 days before the actual date of my visit.

To me with this communication we seemed to have crossed an important obstacle. It was encouraging that we had received positive indication from General Aideed, and a specific invitation to meet him. On the basis of this response I planned to travel to Mogadiscio from Nairobi on the 1st of November, and all logistical arrangements with the United Nations were in place, when the sudden resignation of Amb. Sahnoun made it necessary to postpone the visit to a subsequent date.

Nonetheless, prior to his departure from East Africa to New York, Ambassador Sahnoun telephoned me from Nairobi on October 31, 1992, to inform me that before he left Mogadiscio he had discussed my proposed visit with both Mr. Ali Mahdi and General Aideed. Both had welcomed the same. According to Ambassador Sahnoun, General Aideed even told him that he would be sending me an invitation. About ten days ago, I sent the Chief of Conflict Resolution, Defence and Security Section in the Division of Conflict Management of the General Secretariat to Nairobi and Mogadiscio to continue with the consultations and to establish contacts with the new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Ambassador Ismat Kittani, as well as to make fresh arrangements for my visit to Somalia. While my Special Representative was in Mogadiscio, I went to Nairobi on 10 October, to deliver the Tom Mboya Memorial Lecture. Whilst in Nairobi, I made contacts with the UN officials as well as with Under Secretary General James Johan in New York, in which I had requested the UN co-operation to facilitate my visit to Mogadiscio. Arrangements were consequently finalized by me in Nairobi for the visit. According to these arrangements, I would have left Addis tomorrow, Tuesday, November 17th. I would then have travelled to Mogadiscio by a UN plane at 7.00 o'clock in the morning on Wednesday, November 18th. My programme would have included discussions with various factions in Mogadiscio, spending a night in Mogadiscio and then travelling to Bosaso and Kisimayu and possibly one or two other places before returning to Nairobi.



While I was preparing for this trip, my Representative, the Chief of Conflict Resolution, Defence and Security who was in Mogadiscio met with the Interim President, Mr. Ali Mahdi who warmly welcomed my visit. But before that, he was received by Mr. Awale, the Special Advisor of Foreign Affairs of the Chairman of the United Somali Congress, General Aideed. This was on Friday, 13 November. Mr. Awale conveyed a categoric message from General Aideed that the Secretary General is not welcome to Somalia.

In the light of this development, and taking into account the recommendation of my Representative, I have had to postpone my trip to Somalia. Clearly this last position of General Aideed is in contradiction with the earlier messages which I have received. At the same time however, they seem to confirm the original trend of suspicion to, misperception and misrepresentation of the OAU's position demonstrated by General Aideed's faction. Furthermore, while as in the past, I have tended to ignore the position of hostility demonstrated towards the OAU and especially towards the General Secretariat and sent my representative there repeatedly, I have now to be more circumspect. We shall therefore continue to review the situation and see how best to approach these developments.

All this notwithstanding however the commitment and the determination of the OAU, to do what we can to be helpful must remain firm. I have decided to brief the African Group so that you are aware of the difficulties we have had to operate on and how our efforts continue to be constrained by the unilateral position of some of our brothers in Somalia. But the situation in Somalia cries out and deserves the total engagement of our Organization as indeed the engagement of the international community. Nothing should be allowed to side-track or undermine our resolve.