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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF  
OAU, H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE OBSERVANCE OF THE  
CENTENARY OF THE BATTLE OF ADWA  
20 JUNE, 1995

Your Excellency, the Prime Minister,  
Hon. Members of the Transitional  
Government of Ethiopia,  
Hon. Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are assembled here today to observe the Centenary of the Battle of Adwa. This event is an important landmark in the history of Africa's struggle against foreign domination and foreign rule. It symbolizes the victory of the African peoples in the fight against colonialism in all its manifestations. Indeed the battle of Adwa, signifies Africa's determination and strong will to resist colonialism and bring to an end the scramble for Africa as manifested in the Berlin Conference.

Moreover, as we celebrate this historic event, we do so fully convinced and determined that under no circumstances must Africa again fall prey to a colonial scheme, in whatever form or guise that it may assume in the contemporary world. Adwa restored hope, pride and confidence in the shattered psyche of the African peoples both near and far. Therefore, our presence here today is to mark an event, indeed, an epic event of significant proportion, one that made every African proud.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The story of Adwa is very well-known; an ill-equipped African country had been able to resist and defeat a better equipped European power in search of colonial possessions. Africans who read the story yesterday or will read it tomorrow, will without doubt, feel greater pride than their forebears, for at a time when perceptions of self doubt in Africa are beginning to take hold, the significance of Adwa lies in the fact that an African country had been able to thwart the colonial ambitions of a major European power and preserved its independence. Adwa transformed Ethiopia into a symbol of hope for all oppressed people in Africa and in the plantations across the seas. The slogan "Ethiopia shall rise", during the early years of the nationalist struggle, aptly reflects this sentiment.

In this regard, as we observe the Centenary of the Battle of Adwa today, we should also bear in mind that the sacrifices made at Adwa by those gallant Ethiopian fighters, provided the rest of the Continent with the inspiration for the struggle for liberation and independence. And while we celebrate the Centenary of that epoch event, we must also remember with pride all the other resistance, including those of other parts of Africa such as the Mau Mau resistance in Kenya, the Maji Maji rebellion in Tanzania and the Lobengula resistance against Anglo-boer colonialism in the present Zimbabwe and many others in all parts of Africa that were put up in defence of freedom and independence.

Today, Africa is independent and free. Indeed, with the historic event of April 1994 in South Africa, we successfully concluded the titanic struggle that was embarked upon over thirty-two years ago. Our pre-occupation now should be directed at maximizing the fruits and benefits of independence, taking into account, the objective conditions of the Continent and the fundamental changes taking place in the world around us.

Our independence must be meaningful; and it can only be meaningful when our states are able to respond effectively to the needs and demands of our people. Furthermore, it is my firm conviction that the struggle for and attainment of independence, was never meant to be an end in itself; were that to be the case, then the great visions that the Founding Fathers of the Organisation of African Unity had for our people would cease to be meaningful. Independence was supposed to bring about better living conditions for the African peoples in an environment of justice, equality and freedom. Furthermore, independence was for both political and socio-economic transformation of the African continent. It was to be for the realisation of the aspirations and demands of the African peoples. This is precisely why we are gathered here today to commemorate the victory of the battle of Adwa.

If I have spent some time talking about independence, it is because I am talking about the Battle of Adwa, which was in many ways a battle for independence. To the extent that we remain faithful to the sacrifices for independence, we should accordingly, ask ourselves whether we have indeed met the aspirations of our

people in terms of managing our human and material resources as well as really being in control of our own affairs and ascertaining that the concept of neo-colonialism has only been an abstraction, a phantom which bears no relationship to reality.

I cannot end this brief address without touching on one of the most important significance of the Battle of Adwa. To many of us, the victory which was achieved in Ethiopia, represented what is possible when all the people of a country are united to fight a common cause. If it was possible for the different nationalities of Ethiopia to unite and confront a common enemy on the battlefield of Adwa, it is possible today, to unite for the upliftment and empowerment of the people in a democratic society. It is only by so doing, that the people of Ethiopia, and indeed the people of this great Continent can justify the sacrifices that were made by past generations to bequeath on us, succeeding generations, a Nation and a Continent unshackled by colonial domination and oppression.

Your Excellencies,

It is my earnest and sincere hope that these and other significance of the Battle of Adwa would not be lost sight of as you celebrate a great African victory for which the people of Ethiopia - All the people of Ethiopia - should take pride in It was and remains one of the most heroic achievements on our Continent.

I thank you !