

STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU TO THE OPENING
SESSION OF THE IGAD MINISTERIAL SUB-COMMITTEE
MEETING ON THE CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN SUDAN.
HELD ON 4 AUGUST 1998

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Bonaya Godana,
Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs and
External Cooperation of the Republic of Kenya,
Your Excellency Ato Seyoum Mesfin,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like at the outset, to express my appreciation for the kind invitation extended to me to attend this opening session of the IGAD Ministerial Sub-Committee meeting on the conflict in Southern Sudan. I whole heartedly welcome this initiative which is not only timely but has come at a very critical juncture in the efforts to end this long-running conflict which has greatly contributed to the misery, instability, hunger and disease currently affecting most parts of the Southern Sudan.

We at the OAU have closely followed and supported the talks that are taking place under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). I wish to pay a special tribute to President Daniel Arap Moi, President of the Republic of Kenya and Chairman of the IGAD

initiative, as well as his peers – leaders of the Member States of IGAD for their unrelenting efforts to bring peace to the Sudan. It is however a sad reality that in spite of all those efforts, as well as those by others within and outside our continent, the conflict in Southern Sudan continues to traumatize the ordinary people of that part of our continent, taking a heavy toll on a population that has paid more than its fair share of the prize for this senseless and indefensible conflict. I want to submit to this distinguished gathering, but most importantly, to our brothers and sisters from Sudan, that nothing, absolutely nothing can justify a continuation of this conflict and the attendant suffering that it has inflicted on the people all these years. These people yearn for peace, and we cannot continue to deny them this God-given right.

It is within that context, that I wish to welcome the limited ceasefire that was announced recently by the Government of the SUDAN and the SPLA, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Southern Sudan, as well as the announcement made yesterday by the Council of Ministers of the Sudan, that it was declaring a comprehensive ceasefire throughout Southern Sudan to create a conducive atmosphere for the peace Talks.

Mr. Chairman
Excellencies

The conflict in southern Sudan has gone on far too long. We must speak out and act more forcefully against its continuation because the tragedy that it has left in its trails have been catastrophic for the Sudanese themselves, the Region and the entire continent. This conflict is a

stigmatization of our entire continent. The images of suffering and starving children, women and the elderly, that is flashed around the world by the international media is an indictment on all of us and our collective humanity. The time therefore seems appropriate for us to bring out collective weight and wisdom to assist the peoples of the Sudan rediscover and make peace with each other, within a framework of national reconciliation and justice for all.

Given the humanitarian tragedy which has been unfolding in Southern Sudan, particularly in the Bahr-al-Ghazal Region, I wish to appeal to all the Parties concerned, not only to extend maximum and unconditional cooperation for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, but to ensure the security and protection of aid workers and aid consignments. I wish at the same time, to renew the appeals we had made earlier, to the International Community to continue extending humanitarian assistance to all those affected by the present unfortunate conflict.

All told, the moment seems propitious for both sides to emerge from this third round of peace talks with progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Such a possibility can only come if they approach these talks with a spirit of give and take, bearing in mind always, the paramount interest of the people of the Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the entire continent for a just peace and a prosperous future. Africa expects no less from you and I am confident that you will not let the continent down but rise to the challenge of the day.

I wish to conclude by noting with satisfaction that the efforts of IGAD are enjoying not only the full support of Africa but the international

community at large. We therefore wish to encourage IGAD to pursue these efforts with vigour and determination. It is also clear that the conflict in Sudan calls for an urgent solution. The world community is getting increasingly impatient and frustrated with the lack of definitive movement towards a solution. The OAU will continue to support firmly the efforts of IGAD and express our belief and confidence that the resolution to the conflict will be given urgent and priority consideration.

Sudan is in many ways a microcosm of Africa. It is a mosaic of cultures, races, ethnies and religions. This diversity should be used as a factor of strength rather than division. A strong Sudan at peace with itself, with its people reconciled, will certainly open a new and brighter chapter for the Sudanese people and enhance Africa's strength. We appeal to our brothers and sisters of Sudan here present to live up to that goal.