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ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim
addresses
the Opening Session of
the Informal Preparatory Meeting on
SOMALIA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

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of hope to put in motion a process that will bring about lasting peace in Somalia. We all must resolve here and now to confront this challenge. With such a renewed commitment, we should be able to put an end to the tragedy in Somalia and ensure that Africa will never face any such tragedy in the future. This is my appeal. This is my prayer.

I thank you.

Your Excellency, President Meles Zenawi,
Your Excellency, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali,
Secretary General of the United Nations,
Brother Leaders of the various
Somali Movements,
Your Excellency, the Secretary General of
the League of Arab States,
Your Excellency, the Secretary General of
the Organization of Islamic Conference,
Distinguished Representative of
the Current Chairman of the OAU,
Distinguished Representative of the
Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement,
Distinguished Chairman of the
Standing Committee on the Horn of Africa,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This informal preparatory meeting is historic as it is unique. It brings together in one room leaders of the principal forces in Somalia to interact among themselves and with the international community as represented by the United Nations as well as the Regional Organizations - the OAU, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Conference, the Non-aligned Movement and the Standing Committee on the Horn of Africa. In thanking

you Mr. Secretary General for organizing this meeting and for all your steadfast efforts in finding a solution to the Somali tragedy, I wish to express the hope and expectation of our continental organization that this unique opportunity will be made full use of by all concerned and especially by our Somali brothers.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the countries of the Horn for their generous hospitality and for the tremendous efforts they are deploying in search of peace in Somalia. I would like in particular, to pay due tribute to President Meles Zenawi and, through him to the Government and people of Ethiopia for the unwavering efforts they are making in that regard.

Since the very beginning of the tragedy in Somalia, the OAU has demonstrated its genuine concern and interest in the peaceful resolution of this fratricidal conflict. This concern and interest has been consistent and indepth. The one and only goal of the Organization has been to see an end to this unfortunate conflict and the restoration of

I would also like to declare solemnly to our brothers and sisters of Somalia gathered here, that the OAU is fully committed to a speedy, peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in their country. And, in that regard, it is prepared to do everything within its capacity in cooperation with all men and women of goodwill and especially with the United Nations, other regional organizations and any other bodies and institutions. Indeed, we do believe that it is only through concerted and determined efforts that we can help the Somali people more effectively in overcoming this predicament.

As I have had occasion to state previously, the tragedy in Somalia is not only of concern to the Somalis. All Africans, both men and women, have felt and continue to feel deeply the pain and agony of their brothers and sisters in Somalia.

In conclusion, I would like to urge that we do not miss this opportunity. Considerable damage has already been done to the Somali nation and people. History will not forgive us if we did not take advantage of this ray

of armed groups, and the creation initially of a national police force; the constitution of the country; the interim/transitional administration including its terms of reference and composition; relief and rehabilitation as well as the reconstruction of Somalia. Indeed the issue of the reconstruction of Somalia should not be side-lined because it is of primordial importance to keep the attention of the international community particularly focused on the long term needs of the Somali people if Somalia is to be restored fully as an active member of the African and the international community.

At this juncture, Mr. Chairman, I would like to seize this unique opportunity to appeal to our brothers and sisters from Somalia to work in a spirit of brotherhood and reconciliation. Wisdom is not the exclusive preserve of any one person or group. It is the outcome of the collective will of each and every Somali man and woman. I would in that regard appeal in particular to the elders to provide guidance during this encounter.

peace, security and stability within the context of national unity and reconciliation. The OAU has no other agenda. We favour no particular faction or group. We are biased against none. Our interest is only to support the Somali people to end this nightmare and to build a future for themselves and for their future generations. Our concern has been and continues to be first and foremost the sanctity of life and thereafter to assist in rescuing Somalia from the havoc and destruction that it is now experiencing. In pursuit of this objective, no effort has been spared. At the level of the General Secretariat, at the level of the Office of the Current Chairman of the Organization, at the level of the institutional organs of the Organization and at the level of individual Member States, we have tried our utmost to work for the end of the conflict. We have also strived to sensitize and mobilize international public opinion as we have sought to work closely with the United Nations.

At the time of this meeting, it is also fitting that we express our appreciation for

the support provided by the international community. We particularly thank the unsung heroes of the Somali tragedy - men and women, Somalis and foreigners, who have done so much in harsh and even dangerous circumstances, to alleviate the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. We pay tribute with gratitude to those who have sacrificed their lives for the Somali people. I wish also to register our appreciation for all the assistance given by the countries which have contributed military contingents in Somalia under the auspices of the United Nations. All this is encouraging. Clearly more needs to be done. But whatever is done by the United Nations, the OAU and other regional organizations or by individual African or extra-African countries can only be supplementary to what the Somalis themselves can do. For the maximum that all of us can do is to be helpful. The ultimate responsibility for saving Somalia and restoring it to its rightful place in the comity of nations lies essentially with the Somali people and especially with its leaders - political and community leaders. Thus, the historic and crucial responsibility of the Somali leaders here present is self-evident.

Mr. Chairman,

We see this meeting today as the beginning of a process - an important beginning; a process which should lead to national reconciliation and national unity and which should give hope to the people of Somalia. The Somali leaders here present must devise ways and means to ensure the successful holding of the National Reconciliation Conference. Such a conference needs careful and patient preparation. However, it is important not to act as if we have all the time in the world.

From this meeting, it is the OAU's hope, that we shall put in place a process which will ensure that such a Reconciliation Conference, when held, will achieve its desired objective. Thus, our Somali brothers should not only exchange ideas on issues as date and venue of such a Conference but also on other substantive matters. These issues, which will require reflection and broad agreement among the Somali leaders include: peace and security especially the attainment of a generalised ceasefire which is scrupulously observed by all; disarmament