

ADDRESS OF THE OAU SECRETARY-GENERAL, H.E. MR SALIM AHMED SALIM

BEFORE THE 7TH CONGRESS OF AFRICAN MEDICAL

ASSOCIATIONS AND SOCIETIES (CAMAS)

Addis Ababa, 27th November, 1989.

COMRADE BERHANU BAYIH
MEMBER OF THE POLICAL BUREAU OF CC OF WPE
AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE STATE COUNCIL,
HIS EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER OF HEALTH,
REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF WHO,
THE PRESIDENT OF CAMAS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I AM DEEPLY HONOURED TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORK OF THIS 7TH CONGRESS OF CAMAS. OVER THE YEARS THAT THE OAU HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION, WE HAVE COME TO ADMIRE YOUR COMMITMENT AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE «HEALTH FOR ALL» CAMPAIGN ON OUR CONTINENT. YOU HAVE AT THE LEVEL OF YOUR ORGANIZATION OR LOCAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND INDIVIDUALLY, ENGAGED GOVERNMENTS TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE HEALTH AND MEDICAL NEEDS OF THEIR PEOPLE. YOU HAVE CALLED FOR MORE RESOURCE APPROPRIATION TO THE BUILDING OF INSTITUTIONS DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF HEALTH AT ALL LEVELS FROM THE PRIMARY MEDICAL UNITS LIKE THE RURAL DISPENSARIES AND THE RURAL MEDICAL AIDES TO REFERRAL HOSPITALS WITH CONSULTANTS. YOU HAVE ENCOURAGED PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICAL PRACTICE AMONGST YOURSELVES AND IN THE PROCESS, RAISED THE QUALITY OF CARE YOU ARE ABLE TO RENDER TO THE PATIENTS. I WANT, THEREFORE, TO CONGRATULATE YOU FOR THESE ACHIEVEMENTS AND URGE YOU TO CONTINUE WITH THE GOOD WORK; WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO UNDER SUCH GREAT ODDS.

I AM PARTICULARLY AWARE OF THE DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH YOU HAVE TO PRACTICE YOUR PROFESSION AND IN PARTICULAR THE HARSH CONDITIONS YOU ARE COMPELLED TO DEAL WITH SOMETIMES WITHOUT WATER OR ELECTRICITY - PRIMARY DRUGS, BANDAGES OR EVEN A PASSABLE ROAD TO REACH THOSE WHO NEED YOUR HELP MOST.

BUT IT IS MEMBERS OF YOUR PROFESSION, THE RURAL MEDICAL PERSONNEL, WHO AT THE FRONTLINE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DISEASES, HAVE KEPT THAT CANDLE OF HOPE BURNING. I HOPE THAT AT THE LEVEL OF YOUR ASSOCIATIONS, YOU WILL ENDEAVOUR TO PROMOTE THE WELFARE OF THESE DEDICATED MEN AND WOMEN.

MR CHAIRMAN,

YOUR CONGRESS ON «THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN PHYSICIAN IN THE CONTROL OF AIDS AND HIV INFECTION» IS TIMELY. AIDS HAS BECOME A GLOBAL PHENOMENON. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, RAPID MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION, THE BREAKDOWN OF RACIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS, AMONG OTHERS, HAS FACILITATED GREATER INTERACTION AND CONTACT BETWEEN PEOPLE. TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE ALL THIS POSSIBLE. UNFORTUNATELY, IT HAS ALSO MEANT THAT NO SOCIETY CAN TOTALLY INSULATE ITSELF FROM AIDS OR ITS EFFECTS. IT MEANS , THEREFORE, THAT GLOBAL AS THE DISEASE HAS BECOME, IT REQUIRES A GLOBAL APPROACH TO CONTAIN IT, AND TO SEARCH FOR ITS CURE. THE CHALLENGE IS MONUMENTAL AND THE INVESTMENT, MATERIAL AND

HUMAN, POTENTIALLY STAGGERING. I AM, THEREFORE, ENCOURAGED BY THE HOLDING OF THIS CONGRESS WHICH AIMS AT COORDINATING AFRICA'S RESPONSE TO THIS CHALLENGE AND CONTRIBUTING TO THE GLOBAL EFFORTS.

MR CHAIRMAN,

AIDS IS A SCOURGE WHICH HAS ENGULFED MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD AND IS THREATENING EVERY COUNTRY, EVERY SOCIETY AND EVERY INDIVIDUAL. TODAY, IT IS NO LONGER AN ISSUE OF CONDENSED PREJUDICED DISCUSSION AIMED AT MALIGNING A PARTICULAR PEOPLE OR SEGMENT OF SOCIETY. IT IS A REAL PROBLEM INDEED.

ITS EFFECTS TRANSCEND POLITICS, NATIONAL BOUNDARIES OR RACE. IT IS A NIGHTMARE TO THE ENTIRE WORLD. TIME FOR SELF-SERVING POLITICS HAS, THEREFORE, LONG GONE PAST. NOW, WE SHOULD PULL TOGETHER-AFRICANS, EUROPEANS, ASIANS AND EVERYONE TO LAUNCH A COORDINATED AND UNITED ASSAULT ON THIS PLAGUE.

PERHAPS NOWHERE IS THAT SPIRIT OF UNITY NEEDED MORE THAN IN AFRICA. FOR IT IS IN AFRICA WHERE AIDS HAS HAD ITS MOST GRAPHIC EFFECT AND WHERE ITS DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL IS GREATEST. THIS SAD SITUATION IS EXACERBATED BY THE FACT THAT AFRICA, UNLIKE THE OTHER CONTINENTS, LACKS THE CAPACITY NOT ONLY TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF THE DISEASE, IT ALSO LACKS THE NECESSARY MEANS TO CONTAIN ITS SPREAD. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN ?

FIRST, IT MEANS THAT, UNLIKE THE DEVELOPED WORLD, AFRICA HAS NO ADEQUATE CAPABILITY FOR RESEARCH : THE MEDICAL MANPOWER TO HANDLE THE SICK AND THE INFIRMED; WE DO NOT HAVE THE NECESSARY MEDICINES TO AMELIORATE THE SUFFERING OF THOSE AFFECTED. ABOVE ALL, IT MEANS WE LACK THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOPHISTICATION TO MOUNT PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS TO CONTROL THE SPREAD OF THE DISEASE THROUGH AVOIDABLE CAUSES. AIDS HAS PROVED TO BE MOST RAPIDLY DEBILITATING ON THOSE WHOSE IMMUNITY MECHANISM IS IMPARED BY ILL HEALTH OR INSUFFICIENT BODY RESISTANCE ARISING FROM MALNUTRITION AND POOR SANITARY CONDITIONS. AFRICA'S LOT FALLS IN THIS CATEGORY. THAT IS WHY THE EFFECTS OF THIS KILLER DISEASE HAS PROVED MORE DRAMATICALLY TRAGIC IN AFRICA.

QUITE APART FROM THE INFIRMAMENT AND EVENTUAL KILLING OF ITS VICTIMS AND THE RESULTANT POPULATION LOSS, AIDS STANDS TO AFFECT EVEN MORE ADVERSELY ECONOMIC PRODUCTION ABILITY OF OUR CONTINENT. AFRICA HAS A PREDOMINALLY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY DEPENDENT ON HUMAN RESOURCES. THIS IS, THEREFORE, TO SAY THAT AT THE PRESENT TREND AND RATE OF AIDS RELATED DEATHS, AFRICA'S LABOUR FORCE WILL BE CRITICALLY AFFECTED IN THE FORESEABLE FUTURE UNLESS THE CAMPAIGN FOR PREVENTION ASSUMES DECISIVE PROPORTIONS OR UNLESS THE CURE IS FOUND.

MR CHAIRMAN,

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ? OUR GOVERNMENTS SHOULD RESTORE EMPHASIS ON HEALTH SERVICES FROM GRASS ROOT LEVEL. THEY SHOULD PROMOTE INSTITUTIONS OF PUBLIC HEALTH, EDUCATE AUXILLIARY MEDICAL PERSONNEL AND COORDINATE NATIONAL EFFORTS AT AIDS PREVENTION IN CONCERT WITH THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGNS. IN ADDITION, THERE MUST BE A SUSTAINED PROGRAM TO SUPPLY THESE MEDICAL CENTRES WITH BASIC NEEDS SUCH AS BLOOD SCREENING EQUIPMENT, DISPOSABLE SYRINGES, PROTECTIVE GEAR FOR THE MEDICAL PERSONNEL AND OTHERS. LIKewise, OUR GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE PREPARED, WITHIN THEIR ECONOMIC ABILITIES, TO BUILD AND FUND INSTITUTIONS OF RESEARCH AND DISEASE CONTROL. YOUR ASSOCIATIONS HAVE GREATER CHALLENGE IN THIS REGARD. FOR IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO CALL UPON GOVERNMENTS TO PROLIFERATE RESEARCH CENTRES WHEN YOU THE PHYSICIANS, THE DOCTORS LACK THE PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT AND CALLING FOR RESEARCH. YOU SHOULD ENCOURAGE AND INSTILL INTO EACH OTHER THE SPIRIT OF YEARNING FOR KNOWLEDGE BEYOND THE MONETARY RENUMERATIONS AND COMPLACENCY WHICH COMES WITH THE ATTAINMENT OF BASIC MEDICAL QUALIFICATIONS. YOU SHOULD HAVE THAT PIONEERING SPIRIT WHICH HAS CATAPULTED OTHER CONTINENTS INTO THE SUPER NEW AGE OF MODERNITY IN ALL BRANCHES OF SCIENCE. YOU WILL AGREE WITH ME THAT INDIVIDUALLY, MOST OF OUR COUNTRIES CAN NOT SUPPORT MEANINGFUL RESEARCH PROGRAMS. THEY NEED TO COLLABORATE IN RESEARCH ON DRUGS AND VACCINE PRODUCTION AS WELL AS IN CLINICAL TRIALS.

AT THIS STAGE WHERE THE CURE OF AIDS IS YET TO BE FOUND, THE HOPE OF THE MANKIND RESTS ON PREVENTION ALONE. THE VARIOUS CAMPAIGNS AIMED AT EDUCATING PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE YOUTH ON THE CAUSES OF THE DISEASE HAVE BEGUN TO BEAR SOME FRUIT. BUT AFRICA'S ABILITY TO REACH MOST OF ITS PEOPLE IS SERIOUSLY CONSTRAINED BY LACK OF MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE AND OTHER HANDICAPS INCLUDING ILLITERACY. SOMETIMES, CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICE HAVE MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO EXPERIMENT METHODS OF PREVENTION WHICH HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED. ALL THIS ADDS TO THE ALREADY COMPOUNDED PROBLEM OF DISSEMINATING INFORMATION TO TARGETTED COMMUNITIES. TOGETHER WITH GOVERNMENTS, YOU SHOULD EVOLVE OR DEVISE PUBLIC INFORMATION METHODS WHICH ARE EFFECTIVE, CULTURALLY APPEALING AND ACCEPTABLE.

THE PUBLIC SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF THE ESSENTIAL FACTS RELATING TO AIDS AND HIV INFECTION. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE CREATES SUPERSTITION, PREJUDICE AND A HOST OF OTHER PROBLEMS, PHYSICIANS, THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES (E.G. EDUCATION, INFORMATION, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, WOMEN'S AFFAIRS, RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, ETC) SHOULD DISSEMINATE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH RADIO, TELEVISION, POSTERS IN PUBLIC PLACES, PUBLIC LECTURES, TALKS TO WOMEN IN MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH CLINICS, PLACES OF RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS, ETC. IN SCHOOLS, THE SYLLABUS SHOULD INCLUDE TOPICS ON AIDS AND SEX EDUCATION TO APPROPRIATE AGE GROUPS. OLDER STUDENTS CAN HELP MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS IN TEACHING THE GENERAL

PUBLIC. IF THEY ARE TO TEACH OTHERS, PHYSICIANS MUST KEEP ABREAST WITH THE CURRENT FINDINGS ABOUT AIDS AND HIV INFECTION THROUGH CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION AND REFRESHER COURSES. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CONTROL PROGRAMS SHOULD BE SOLICITED FROM GOVERNMENTS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, PRIVATE DONOR GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS.

THERE IS A SOCIAL ASPECT OF AIDS IN WHICH YOU PHYSICIANS HAVE A PIVOTAL ROLE. YOU SHOULD PROVIDE THE LEAD IN EDUCATING THE PUBLIC AND FAMILIES OF INFECTED PATIENTS ON THE NEED FOR SYMPATHY AND COMPASSION. IN ADDITION TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY TO THE SICK, THE DOCTORS SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO ENSURE THAT EVEN NEAR THEIR DEATHS, THESE AIDS VICTIMS ARE TREATED AS VALUED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY AND NOT AS UNDESIRABLE DISEASE RIDDEN INDIVIDUALS. DOCTORS SHOULD ALSO EDUCATE PEOPLE AND FIGHT THE ALARMIST NOTION THAT AIDS CAN BE TRANSMITTED THROUGH CASUAL CONTACT. YOU SHOULD NEITHER SHUN THE SICK NOR EXPLOIT THEM. TO THAT EXTENT, YOU HAVE THE DUTY TO WEED YOUR ASSOCIATIONS OF THOSE ELEMENTS WHICH SEEK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SICK BY FALSE PROMISES OF CURE MOTIVATED BY MONETARY GREED. THIS IS AS MUCH A REQUIREMENT OF PLAIN DESCENCY AS IT IS OF THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH YOU HAVE TAKEN.

MR CHAIRMAN,

THE CURRENT HIGH STRUNG INTERNATIONAL PREOCCUPATION WITH THE AIDS EPIDEMIC MUST BE MAINTAINED AND CONSOLIDATED. IT IS NOT ANYMORE A QUESTION OF CHOICE AS IT IS THAT OF THE VERY SURVIVAL OF OUR POPULATIONS. LIKE THE MANY PLAGUES WHICH HAVE DESCENDED UPON MANKIND IN THE PAST, IT THREATENS TO WIPE OUT ENTIRE POPULATIONS. BUT UNLIKE MOST OF THE PAST, IT IS THE VERY YOUNG AND THE YOUTH, BOTH ACTIVE SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION, WHICH ARE THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO CONTRACTION OF THE AIDS VIRUS. IN OTHER WORDS, AIDS IS CONCENTRATED MOSTLY ON THE YOUNG GENERATION - THE LEADERS OF THE FUTURE, OUR DOCTORS, ENGINEERS, ARTISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS OF TOMORROW. WE SHOULD, THEREFORE, PERSIST IN OUR EFFORTS.

BUT I WISH TO CAUTION ON A NEW PHENOMENON WHICH SEEMS TO BE CREEPING IN. THERE IS DISCERNIBLE TEMPTATION ON THE PART OF THE DONOR COMMUNITY AND AN UNWITTING AND ALMOST UNCONSCIOUS COMPLIANCE OF OUR GOVERNMENTS AND MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS TO PROGRESSIVELY DIMINISH EMPHASIS ON OTHER EQUALLY DEBILITATING AND LETHAL DISEASES. THIS TEMPTATION IS FACILITATED IN PART BY THE GLOBAL CHARACTER OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC AND NOTORIETY IT HAS ACQUIRED. UNDERSTANDABLY, IT WOULD NOT BE FAIR OR INDEED REALISTIC TO EXPECT EUROPEANS OR NORTH AMERICANS TO BE AS PASSIONATELY INVOLVED WITH THE SEARCH FOR A CURE OF MALARIA WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY TO THEM A DISTANT DISEASE AS THEY WOULD BE WITH AIDS FOR INSTANCE.

WHILE WE ACCEPT THIS EMPHASIS ON AIDS, WE SHOULD INSIST THAT COMENSURATE ATTENTION CONTINUES TO BE PAID TO OTHER KILLER DISEASES AS WELL. AFTERALL, STATISTICALLY MALARIA HAS KILLED AND CONTINUES TO KILL MORE PEOPLE IN AFRICA ! YOU AS PRACTITIONERS SHOULD INSIST TO AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS AND DONOR AGENCIES ALIKE TO RETAIN A REASONABLE BALANCE OF EMPHASIS ON OTHER DISEASES, BEARING IN MIND, OF COURSE, THAT AIDS HAS NO CURE YET !

MR CHAIRMAN,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,

THIS CONGRESS REPRESENTS AN EMBODIMENT OF AFRICA'S COLLECTIVE WILL AND DETERMINATION TO DEPLOY ALL ITS RESOURCES AND ENERGIES FULLY TO THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS. IT IS A FURTHER ATTEMPT AT ELABORATING MECHANISMS AND COORDINATING OUR EFFORTS.

THIS CONGRESS WILL AFFORD YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE NATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES IN THE CONTROL OF THE DISEASE AS WELL AS RESEARCHES YOU HAVE CONDUCTED. IT SHOULD ALSO CONTINUE TO BE A FOCAL POINT IN COORDINATING RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON THE DISEASE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, HOWEVER, I HOPE IT WILL GIVE YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK FORWARD, TO FOCUS ON THE FUTURE AND CHART OUT OUR STRATEGIES AND COURSE OF ACTION FOR THE FUTURE.

I HOPE YOU WILL RISE TO THAT CHALLENGE.

THANK YOU.