



**Organization of African Unity**

**STATEMENT BY  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,  
AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF THE  
COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA**

**ALGIERS, ALGERIA**

**12 DECEMBER 2000**

This is a great day for Africa.

The signing of a peace Agreement between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia puts an end to one of the most devastating conflicts on our continent. This is an event, which is of significant importance not only for the two countries, but also for Africa as a whole, as well as for the friends of the continent. Indeed, the sad conflict between these two countries, that are tied together by a bond of a shared history, a common culture and blood relations, was a pain for their people and for the African people as a whole. It was also deeply felt by many friends beyond the continent.

There was so much hope in the continent, as the people of the two countries victoriously emerged out of a sad chapter in their common history and demonstrated a fine example of cooperation and solidarity in the continent. It was, therefore, tragic and agonizing to see them again enter into a bloody conflict that we all felt should not have happened. The most important point as we convene here today is to look to the future and see how we can consolidate what we have all relentlessly worked for in the last two years. In signing this Agreement, the leaders of Eritrea and Ethiopia are sending a strong signal that the tragedy is now behind them. Africa and the international community need to constructively assist the people of the two countries as they begin a post conflict chapter in their relations. Urgent assistance is especially required in support of socio-economic development in the two countries.

We have come to where we are largely because of the positive disposition and commitment of the two parties to end the conflict. To both of them, I wish to express our appreciation for their courage and vision in not allowing the frustration and bitterness of the conflict to overwhelm their judgement in favor of the peace option. I salute them for the positive disposition that they have demonstrated in ensuring the full respect of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. I remain confident that the same disposition will continue in the implementation of today's historic Peace Agreement which will require flexibility and concerted and collective efforts, especially in re-establishing trust between their two peoples. In extending our sincere congratulations to President Isaias and Prime Minister Meles and their respective peoples, I wish to assure them that we shall continue to stand by them as they embark on the difficult but necessary path of healing and mutual understanding.

The relief and victory signified by the signing of this comprehensive Peace Agreement are not only for the two parties concerned. Rather, they are shared by Africa as a whole. Whether as individuals or in their collective being, African leaders from all parts of our continent consistently and actively sought every means to bring to an end the catastrophe befalling their fellow Africans in the two countries. Right from the Summit in Ouagadougou, to that of Algiers, and last July in Lomé, African leaders endeavored to consolidate the path to peace. In these efforts, Africa was supported and assisted by many friends outside the continent.

I wish in this regard to pay particular tribute to all the facilitators who have assisted the two parties on their journey towards peace since the beginning of the conflict. I have in mind, in particular, the US-Rwanda facilitators, who were involved at the very early stage of the conflict ;as well as the OAU High Level Delegation, led by President Compaore of Burkina Faso and including the Presidents of Djibouti and Zimbabwe, which, for one year, devoted considerable time and efforts to the search for a peaceful solution. The Framework Agreement which it submitted to the two parties paved the way for the settlement of the conflict.

Words cannot sufficiently express our profound appreciation and gratitude to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika for the efforts he has made, with commitment, vigour and determination, in assisting the two parties to reach a peaceful agreement. His efforts, for a whole year, as Chairman of our continental organisation, during which I had the pleasure and privilege of working very closely with him, led to the signing, in Algiers, on 18 June 2000, of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the two countries. After his tenure as Chairman of the OAU, and at the request of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, he kindly accepted to continue with his efforts. It is a moment of pride to see that these efforts have now been crowned with the signing of this Peace Agreement.

Mr President, history will record your invaluable contribution to peace on our continent. I know how much time and energy you have devoted to this peace process. Your personal and sustained involvement has indeed made a difference. You have made Africa proud. And, through your role and actions, you have clearly enhanced the capacity of our continental organization in dealing with African crises.

I wish also to place on record our appreciation for the untiring efforts and invaluable contribution made in support of the OAU's efforts by the Government of the United States and by especially President Clinton in person. My thanks also go to our partners in the the European Union.

Naturally, our gratitude goes to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, for his continued support and encouragement and to the international community at large.

At this juncture, I want to place on record our appreciation to the negotiating team which has worked very hard over the past two and a half years. They include: the Personal Envoy of President Bouteflika, Minister Ahmed Ouyahia and later, Minister Missahel; the OAU Secretariat Team under the leadership of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ambassador Said Djinnit; the US Team led by President Clinton's Envoy and Former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake and including Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice, and National Security Council Director for African Affairs Gayle Smith; as well as the European Union Team led by Senator Reno Serri.

We are, therefore, gathered here today to celebrate peace and celebrate victory. A victory first and foremost for the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea who deserve lasting peace. But, a victory also for Africa, which gains from every success that is achieved in any of its regions. Above all, it is a victory for international cooperation as the success was brought about by partners who worked closely together, and were united in their commitment to peace and in their friendship with the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Finally, I wish to note that this Peace Agreement comes as a great morale booster to our peoples at the end of this year which, at the initiative of President Obasanjo, the OAU proclaimed a Year of Peace, Security and Solidarity. Unfortunately, it was a year which did not spare our people from the suffering and tribulation of conflicts. Under the circumstances, no better gift could, therefore, be offered to the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea and to the people of Africa as a whole than this Peace Agreement coming, as it has, when we are about to celebrate Christmas and Eid-Al-Fitr. Certainly, for the Organization of African Unity, which has invested so much in the Peace Process, this Agreement is most rewarding and inspiring.

For this Peace Agreement to be sealed here in Algiers is also symbolic and gratifying, knowing, as we do, the genuine and constant commitment of this country, its people and its leaders to peace and the well being of Africa and its peoples.

In as much as the devastating war between Eritrea and Ethiopia inflicted pain on all Africans, let today's historic Peace Agreement be a source of inspiration, determination and commitment to intensify our efforts to end conflicts in our continent and promote peace and stability.