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**STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM**  
**SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU ON THE**  
**OCCASION OF THE 68<sup>TH</sup> ORDINARY SESSION**  
**OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

OUAGADOUGOU,  
4 JUNE 1998

**Your Excellency Mr. Désiré Kadré Ouedraogo  
Prime Minister of Burkina Faso,**

**The Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International  
Cooperation of the United Republic of  
Tanzania and Chairman of the 67<sup>th</sup> Ordinary  
Session of the Council of Ministers,**

**Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to join the Government and People of Burkina Faso in extending to you all a very warm welcome to Ouagadougou on the occasion of the 68<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers. I would like, at the outset, to pay a most deserving tribute to the Government and People of Burkina Faso for the warmth of their welcome which has been in the best tradition of African hospitality.

I wish also to put on record my profound appreciation and gratitude to H.E. Blaise Compaoré, the President of Burkina Faso, his Government and People for the commitment they have demonstrated in the course of the preparation of these sessions of Council and Summit and for the exemplary manner in which they have assumed their responsibility in creating the most favourable conditions for the hosting of the meetings of our continental Organization. They have gone out of their way to avail the best facilities possible in order to provide the most propitious environment for the deliberations of the policy organs of the Organization. I wish to thank them most sincerely for having offered the best they could to make our stay as comfortable as possible and, above all, to make us feel at home. This is indeed, a testimony to the commitment of the Burkinabe people and their leadership to the Organization of African Unity, its ideals, principles and objectives.

**Mr. Chairman,**

In the introductory note to my Report, I have briefed Council on some of the major developments on our continent and the efforts deployed by the Organization and its Member States, since the last session of Council, to address the various problems that confront our continent.

I shall, therefore, limit myself to sharing with Council some views on the state and role of our Organization since its Harare sessions which provided a great momentum and gave a new impetus to our collective continental efforts.

I would like to start on a positive and encouraging note regarding the financial situation of our Organization. I am pleased to inform Council that the financial situation of the Organization has continued to improve since the Harare sessions. Member States have continued to make determined efforts aimed at honouring their financial obligations to the Organization and, particularly at clearing their arrears. As a result of these efforts, the total amount

of arrears of contribution has been reduced by almost half over the last years. I wish to seize this opportunity to commend our Member States for concretely demonstrating their commitment to their continental Organization and encourage them to persevere on this path which has contributed greatly to the enhancement of the credibility of our Organization.

On the political front, you will recall that, in Harare, Africa displayed remarkable cohesion and decisiveness in dealing with the crisis which erupted in Sierra Leone following the coup d'état by a military Junta. This swift, decisive and unequivocal reaction by our continental Organization against the coup and the crucial role played subsequently by ECOWAS and ECOMOG, on behalf of the continent, led to the early restoration of the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone.

This development represented a turning point in the determination and commitment of Africa and its leaders to

reject illegal seizure of power from a duly elected Government and the use of force against the will of the people. The successful ousting of the illegal military Junta was, therefore, a major victory to Africa in its efforts to engender democratic rule in our societies. It also strengthened Africa's will and commitment to stand in defence of democracy in the continent.

The position of principle which Africa took in the case of Sierra Leone marked the continued determination of the continent to ensure that democracy gains root in the continent. Despite the difficulties experienced in some parts of the continent, the path of democratization has been, on the whole, sustained. Indeed, the contribution of the civil society is increasingly being recognized in our continent and grass-root and non-governmental organizations are assuming greater role in promoting democracy, good governance and the respect for human rights. Clearly, more needs to be done to ensure that the human and people's rights of our people are guaranteed, promoted and

protected. It is, therefore, particularly relevant to recommit ourselves to this objective as we celebrate, this year, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The experience of Sierra Leone has clearly demonstrated that when our Organization and its Member States act together in unison and move with speed and resolve, there are real prospects for success in overcoming crisis situations. It has also highlighted the importance for the continental Organization and the regional groupings to work in tandem within a clear division of roles and responsibilities. It is thus, important to draw lessons from our past and recent experiences on how to strengthen further our capacity to act together in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. This is especially pertinent as we are still confronted with the daunting challenge of seeking durable peace in various parts of the continent.

**Mr. Chairman,**

It was against this optimistic background for peace in the continent since the Harare Summit and the promising prospects for understanding and entente in the Horn of Africa that we received with shock and concern the news of the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This unfortunate development constitutes a severe setback to our efforts at forging peace, security and stability.

Since the eruption of the crisis, I have maintained close contacts with both parties as well as with African leaders whom I have encouraged to assist in defusing the tension prevailing between the two countries. I have held discussions with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and President Isaias Afwerki of the State of Eritrea in Addis Ababa and in Asmara respectively. I have urged them to exercise restraint and give peace a chance. In my discussions with



them, I was encouraged by the disposition that both President Isaias and Prime Minister Meles demonstrated in pursuit of a peaceful solution to the crisis. Both leaders were conscious of the far-reaching and devastating consequences of war for both their countries and people. They expressed their readiness to explore all avenues to avoid the use of force.

I have also kept contacts with the Chairman of IGAD, President Gouled Aptidon whom I met in Djibouti and with the team of Facilitators from Rwanda and USA who have been working tirelessly to promote a peaceful and durable settlement of the dispute and, more immediately, to avoid a further escalation of the conflict. In this regard, the Facilitators have endeavoured to narrow the differences between the two parties and secure their agreement to a set of guiding principles for the settlement of the dispute. The Facilitators have also proposed a series of measures on reducing current tensions without prejudice to the territorial claims of either party.

It is a matter of regret and deep concern that after so much efforts by the Facilitators and other African leaders which, initially resulted in very encouraging indications for a peaceful settlement of the dispute, tension has again built up and a stalemate now seems to prevail. More ominously, the situation has been deteriorating in the last few days with reports of border skirmishes involving loss of life. Presently, the situation is extremely grave.

I wish to reiterate that a military confrontation can only bring about suffering and destruction to both countries and peoples. It is a conflict which no one can win. There can only be losers. And the losers will not only be Ethiopia and Eritrea or for that matter the Horn of Africa region but the continent as a whole. It would be unfortunate and very tragic if Ethiopia and Eritrea which have invested so much in promoting peace in the region were to allow their present dispute to escalate into a military confrontation and seriously undermine the gains of peace achieved by their peoples after prolonged conflict and untold sacrifices.

They owe it to their peoples and to Africa to settle this crisis peacefully. I wish to, once again, appeal to the leaders of both countries to exercise maximum restraint, to put an end to the fighting and explore all avenues for an early and peaceful solution to the crisis. In this context, I believe that the recommendations put forward by the Facilitators do provide a sound and realistic basis for a peaceful settlement of the dispute and accordingly appeal to both parties to give them the most serious and urgent consideration. I also believe that this Council and later the Summit have a clear obligation to put the entire weight of our continent in support of a peaceful resolution and avoid the widening of the conflict whose catastrophic consequences are self-evident.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The current crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea is yet another situation which points to the need for greater vigilance and preparedness on the part of our Organization

and its Member States to deal with conflict situations in the continent. This demands greater determination to act in concert and requires increased resources to enable our Organization to fulfil its responsibilities.

We need, therefore, to take more seriously our continental mechanism for promoting peace through the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and to extend to it the necessary political and financial support to enable it function adequately.

One of the issues at stake is the ownership of the Mechanism which we consider as paramount in our collective efforts to address the scourge of conflict in the continent on the basis of our own agenda and concerns. In this regard, while we appreciate the support being extended to the Mechanism from outside the continent, it is important to underline the fact that our Mechanism should rely principally on resources from within the continent. Regrettably however, this has not been the case so far.

Indeed, the contribution by our Member States has, to-date, been rather modest. I wish, therefore, to take this opportunity to appeal to our Member States and to the African people, in general, to make contributions to the OAU Peace Fund in order to sustain the activities of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

I would now like to draw the attention of Council to a problem related to the functioning of the Mechanism. Honourable Ministers are quite familiar with the difficulties we have been facing in this regard, particularly in convening the Central Organ at Summit and, to some extent, Ministerial levels. The Central Organ, at Ambassadorial level, and the General Secretariat have been reflecting on how best to improve the working methods of the Mechanism and its Central Organ. It is my hope that Council will extend its support and encouragement to the on-going process aimed at enhancing the efficiency and efficacy of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention,

Management and Resolution taking into account our experience over the last five years.

As part of these efforts to strengthen OAU's capacity to deal with conflict situations and after consultations with the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, I have established the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development. The Committee which was established pursuant to a decision of Council, is expected to serve as an advisory body to the Secretary General of the OAU and the Executive Secretary of the ECA on issues relating to gender and the involvement of women in the mainstream of the continent's efforts aimed at preventing, managing and resolving conflicts and their active participation in decision making for sustainable development. I consider this initiative as timely, especially given the role and contribution African women can and should make in the promotion of peace and development.

Furthemore, following the proposal made by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, on the establishment of an International Panel of Eminent Personalities to investigate the genocide in Rwanda and the surrounding events, and its subsequent endorsement by the Central Organ and Council, I undertook the necessary consultations for the establishment of the Panel. I am pleased to inform Council that following consultations with President Robert Gabriel Mugabe of Zimbabwe, the Current Chairman of the OAU, I, yesterday, announced the composition of the Panel. The Panel will be headed by the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire, and comprises six other Eminent Personalities from within and outside Africa.

The Panel is expected to hold its inaugural session in early September in Addis Ababa where its Headquarters are located. Immediately thereafter, the Panel will undertake a visit to Rwanda where it will attend a solemn ceremony in memory of the victims of the genocide. It will

also visit the countries of the region and elsewhere as appropriate.

I wish to seize the opportunity to appeal to Member States and to all other States and institutions concerned to extend their full cooperation to the Panel to enable it to discharge its important responsibilities. Indeed, the knowledge of what went wrong and what was not done to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, is critical for us, particularly as part of our efforts to prevent future occurrence of a tragedy of such magnitude. For the Great Lakes Region, this is absolutely essential as we continue to receive very disturbing news of the killings and massacres of innocent people by some of those who are believed to have been involved in the planning and execution of the genocide in Rwanda.



**Mr. Chairman,**

On the economic front, we are encouraged by the performance of the continent as most of our countries have registered significant and sustained growth over the last years. This is the result of the efforts and the bold economic and structural reforms undertaken by our Member States. This encouraging progress should not, however, overshadow the serious socio-economic problems still facing our countries. Clearly, concerted efforts need to be deployed towards alleviating poverty which affect large and, unfortunately, increasing segments of our societies. We also need to seriously address the problem of basic infrastructure and to improve transport and communication facilities in our countries, so as to accelerate economic growth and development.

At the same time, the social dimension of development should be duly taken into account so as to

ensure that the most vulnerable groups amongst our people should not be left to pay the severe cost of economic reforms and restructuring. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that our people are not deprived of the basic social services such as health, shelter and education. Above all, we should endeavour to promote socio-economic policies which can guarantee the participation of all segments of our societies, including youth and women and which provides equal opportunities for all.

I do realize that these measures are easier said than done, but as the proverb says, “every journey of a thousand miles begins with the first mile”. In these circumstances, the journey is the building of the African Economic Community, which our leaders have already identified as the most viable framework for collective and concerted action to address the socio-economic challenges facing our continent and its peoples. We have embarked on this long journey when our Member States adopted the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. In Harare,

we made the first step in the long march towards the economic integration of the continent when African leaders held their first inaugural session as the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Economic Community. The Harare Summit, therefore, sent a strong signal of Africa's collective determination to vigorously pursue the path of economic integration and cooperation and set the tone for the establishment of the African Economic Community.

In this collective African undertaking, time is clearly of essence. The challenge before us, therefore, is one of maintaining the integration process high on our agenda. This requires our sustained determination. It also requires resources. However, our enthusiasm over the last year has been somewhat dampened by the poor attendance by Member States at the appropriate level to the meetings of the Economic and Social Commission. I wish to seize this opportunity to urge Member States to pay greater attention to the activities of the Commission which is expected to be

the driving force in the building of the community. Moreover, the Commission, constitutes the most appropriate forum where African States can coordinate their positions on matters of common concern and interest to them, especially at a time when our continent is called upon to defend its interests in global negotiations, particularly those being carried out within the framework of the World Trade Organization.

I also wish to seek the understanding and support of Council on the need to provide the resources necessary for the implementation of the work programme adopted by ECOSOC. It is important to translate in terms of financial commitment, the priority that our leaders attach to the promotion of economic cooperation and integration on our continent.

In this and other endeavours, our Organization should be able to play a catalytic role in channelling our energies and resources to better serve the interests of our continent

and its peoples. At the same time, it is clear that for the OAU to be in a position to play such a role in an effective and efficient manner, a programme of reform and renewal of the Organization becomes all the more necessary and urgent. We should not shy away from taking the appropriate measures to rationalize the structure and the methods of work of our Organization and to update them to the new requirements and exigencies of the situation prevailing on our continent and in the world at large. The Organization which served our continent fairly well over the last 35 years and which has gained considerable credibility should be enabled to better serve our continent and its people as we confront new challenges.

In Harare, your Council and subsequently the Summit, welcomed the programme of reform and renewal I submitted to them. Since then, we, at the Secretariat, have initiated action towards the implementation of that programme. In particular, we, together with the Committee on Structural Reform, have pursued the much needed

restructuring of the General Secretariat. It is my fervent hope that the Ouagadougou sessions of our Organization will extend their full support to the restructuring exercise. I am aware that Council is conscious of the fact that the ultimate objective of this exercise is to provide a renewed General Secretariat which will serve the Organization and its Member States more efficiently and effectively. I strongly believe that this is the way forward as we celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our continental Organization and as we prepare to enter into the new millennium.

I thank you.