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Organization of African Unity

STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
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**Your Excellency, President Diouf,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and
Government,
Reverend Sullivan,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The presence in this hall of so many eminent personalities of Africa and African descent fills me with great joy and hope. Joy, because this gathering, to my mind, represents one great family reunion, and hope because of the new vistas of cooperative action such a reunion can bestow.

But allow me at this stage to discharge a pleasant duty, a duty that is in consonance with the traditions of Africa. I wish to add my voice to that of His Excellency Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal, in welcoming you to Dakar and to Africa, your Homeland. Only a few kilometers from here in Goree, is a living monument to this historic fact. Most of you are no strangers to the Continent, but to those of you who are seeing Africa for the first time, we wish you all a hearty welcome and a spiritual reunion with the motherland. I wish also to express my sentiments of appreciation and gratitude to the President, the Government and the people of Senegal for their generous and warm hospitality and for the most propitious conditions they have created for this important gathering.

The meeting here in Dakar is the third encounter between the leadership in Africa and the leadership of our brothers and sisters from the United States of America. And this happy initiative is the product of hard work by the Rev. Dr. Leon Howard Sullivan and his Associates. I, as the Secretary General of the OAU, know the intrinsic value of this initiative. This privileged position has brought me face to face with the complex and manifold problems that plague our continent as well as the means at our disposal to address these problems. It is in this connection that my sense of feeling comes into play when once a while, a voice in the wilderness is heard pleading the cause of Africa, such as our brothers and sisters, African-Americans have been doing for sometime now. We are grateful for this vital support.

And whilst on the subject of support, let me recall your contribution to the decolonization process in Africa, especially in our titanic struggle against the apartheid system in Southern Africa. We recall in particular your leading role in the campaign for sanctions against the racist Pretoria regime, the pickets at South African Embassy and your determination to defy police arrests and harassment. A little more than a year ago, we all had the unique pleasure and joy of witnessing our life long struggle crowned with success when political power was transferred to the oppressed people of South Africa. The significance and joy of that momentous occasion will live in our minds for a long long time to come. I wish, on behalf of the OAU and indeed on behalf of the People of Africa, to place on record, our

profound gratitude for your support and solidarity. I request you to convey these sentiments to the rank and file of our brothers and sisters in America.

With the closure of the chapter on decolonization, we have opened a new window as much as new issues have imposed themselves upon us. Our Agenda today is one of emergencies, every single item on it requires measures of an urgent nature. All of you are very familiar with these problems which, I am sure, moved you into action to determine what you can do in order to be helpful. Between Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon, you have no doubt covered the analysis of most of these problems. On that score, I shall therefore confine myself to the salient features of these problems which span the socio-economic and political situation on the Continent.

Let me begin with the economy which for more than a decade has been in crisis. True, some wrong policies, conflict situations and natural calamities have contributed to this situation. But they do not constitute the whole truth about the prevailing economic crisis in Africa. For the most part, Africa remains at the mercy of forces beyond its control. Our worsening poverty is the result of the interplay of those forces.

The continuing decline in commodity and raw material prices has meant that we have to produce a lot more today in order to earn the same amount we earned yesterday. In other words the more we produce the less we get, because others determine for us how much they want to pay for our

produce. A different picture however obtains at the level of imports where we need more money today to be able to buy the same amount of goods we bought yesterday. Unlike in Africa, those who produce these goods determine the price at which we must buy the goods.

The next factor in the poverty of the African, is the excruciating debt burden. The heavy debt burden of the majority of African countries has now reached unbearable levels. In most of our countries, debt servicing takes up to 80% of export earnings. With such a crippling situation, the development of Africa is effectively undermined and subverted. Our call for an International Conference on Africa's Debt Situation has not yet received support from creditor countries and the multilateral financial institutions. And there is no indication that it ever will. The seriousness of this situation has brought us to a point where we are now calling for outright cancellation of those debts.

In sum, it is the combination of these internal and external factors that produced the crisis in Africa. The economic woes of Africa therefore can be reversed only when there is corresponding action at both levels. So far the evidence points to only one direction. For almost a decade, most African countries have scrupulously followed structural reforms under the supervision and direction of the World Bank and the IMF, reforms that cannot be said to be home-grown; nor can anyone vouch for their sustainability and long term prospects for the development of the Continent. Our states have followed the adjustment policies at great political and

social cost. It is increasingly becoming impossible for most of our people to have access to education, to health facilities and to basic social services. By adopting these policies, African countries also expected that their commitment to the implementation of SAPS would entail commensurate investment flows and additional resources. Unfortunately, this has not been the case as there has been a noticeable shift of resource-flows away from African countries.

Our situation and the impact of the fundamental changes taking place in the world have not been lost on our Member States. Our Member States are increasingly becoming aware that none of them, however big and however well endowed, can go it alone, in the face of the emerging new economic world order. We have preached unity for decades, but now we either have to face reality or face further marginalization. Happily, our States have recognized that our survival depends to a large extent on continental cooperation and integration, that is why the Treaty for the African Economic Community is now in force. It is our response to the global changes and our blue print for survival.

Mr. Chairman,

Another item on our Agenda relates to governance, or what has been referred to as the "Second Wind of Change". Just as our States have been deploying great efforts to reform the economies of our countries, so also have they been

making great efforts at transforming the political systems of predominantly one-party and in some cases military regimes to a multi-party democratic systems.

It has not been an easy exercise and it will not be for sometime. In places it has created its own tensions and revived latent ones. A great deal requires to be done in terms of civic education. Winners have not always been good winners just as losers have not always been good losers. A culture of tolerance develops on the basis of experience and education, in the same manner as the efficient establishment of democratic institutions. These are teething problems which we are bound to overcome with time. What is more important is our commitment to the democratic process which is unequivocal. As for the rest, we are aware that the path has many obstacles.

But the gains in the democratic process must go hand in hand with economic gains and must be mutually reinforcing. This is why those who have strongly supported our drive towards democracy should demonstrate equal support for our development efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

Talking of a link also brings to mind the need for peace on the continent without which our efforts for socio-economic development and democratic transformations would be greatly hampered. The absence of peace therefore has introduced an element, in fact forced an item unto the centre-stage of our Agenda. Today, we devote more and more

time, energy and resources to conflicts and conflict-related issues. Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and now Burundi evoke such memories of horror that will continue to traumatize and haunt our collective psyche. The memories of those walking human skeletons and sordid carnage in the killing fields of Rwanda and elsewhere splashed across your television sets provoked in you as much as it did to us, the need to salvage our honour and dignity.

In setting up the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, we did not lose sight of the severe resource and logistic constraints. But we had no option but to take that initiative in the confident hope that the people of Africa would make the necessary sacrifice and that the international community would not fail to demonstrate its solidarity with us. We have, to that end, set up a Peace Fund into which voluntary contributions from governments, organizations and individuals should be channelled. Through this mechanism and with the active support of the international community, we hope to eliminate the scourge of conflicts that plague our Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

Our problems are many and I have chosen to share with you those connected with our poverty and our conflicts, because these are the problems that sometimes make you feel sad as African-Americans; and the same is true of all the brothers and sisters in the diaspora. I mention these because these are the underlying reasons for the

initiative that has brought us together. And from my own perspective I flag these problems for the attention of a Constituency we ought to have created many many years ago.

I am sure the last two sessions of this Summit might have devoted considerable attention in terms of what we can do together. While we encourage informal and formal contacts at individual and bilateral level, I think the time has come for us to expedite our actions at the multi-lateral level so as to establish the general framework for the conduct of our relations. From our side, the problems I have referred to constitute the points of reference. We need investments to back our developmental efforts. Most of our States have created attractive investment climate, but as we are realizing, it takes a lot more than attractive environment to secure investments from abroad. I am informed that arrangements have been made for contacts to be established during this session in connection with trade and investment openings. We welcome this opportunity and hope that advantage could be taken of the opportunity created. Issues relating to cultural industries could be looked into. We also need your support for our efforts at conflict resolution and management.

Let us then resolve to do all that we have neglected to do, build bridges, mend the fences and reconstruct the fabric of our common being. Let us, by dint of hard work, lay the foundation for a better tomorrow. We have a historic responsibility, we dare not fail.

I thank you.