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**INTRODUCTORY NOTE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL
ON THE SITUATION IN BURUNDI
TO THE THIRD EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE OAU MECHANISM
FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION
AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL**

ADDIS ABABA

11 SEPTEMBER 1995

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Prime Minister of Burundi,

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is barely three months since we last met here to prepare for the Thirty First Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. I wish at the outset to express my personal appreciation and that of the General Secretariat for your very encouraging response to the invitation to attend this Extra-Ordinary Session of the Central Organ. I am convinced that over and above your known personal commitment and that of your respective countries to the effectiveness of our Continental Organization, your presence in Addis Ababa today is a testimony to your concern over the disturbing situation in Burundi and your support for efforts in the search for a durable and peaceful settlement of the conflict in that country. I am particularly gratified that the Prime Minister of Burundi, His Excellency Antoine Nduwayo has come especially to Addis Ababa to participate in this important Session of the Central Organ. His contribution to our deliberations will certainly be of immense value.

Distinguished Ministers will recall that one of the issues extensively discussed during the last session of the Council of Ministers, was the deteriorating situation in Burundi. You will also recall, that at their Summit meeting here in Addis Ababa, our leaders engaged in a very frank and profound exchange of views, on what needed to be done to facilitate the process of national reconciliation and the return of peace to Burundi.

In sharing with our leaders my assessment of the situation in Burundi, I did express my grave concern over the extremely precarious and potentially explosive chain of events, developments and experiences which the country was undergoing. Indeed, I drew attention to the actions of extremists on both sides of the political spectrum which at the time, had almost eclipsed the forces of moderation and weakened the authority of the State and its Institutions.

It was my view then as it is now, that our Observer Mission in Burundi, has almost had to perform a mission impossible, sometimes in very risky circumstances, because of the actions of some of those the Mission was expected to help. As you also know, the OAU has engaged all the political actors in Burundi in dialogue continuously and I have, in the course of my many visits to that country, had to stress the need for the security forces to act professionally at the service of all Burundis without distinction. Regrettably,

despite our efforts and those of the moderate elements in the Burundi political circles, a dangerous polarization of the political situation could not be avoided. Furthermore, it remains very true, that there are some elements within the ranks of the security forces who have continued to take unilateral actions, in certain instances, under the influence of some politicians and in other cases, as a result of provocations by extremist Armed Bands and militiamen.

Based on that assessment and the substantial contributions from the leaders themselves, the Assembly took two important decisions. First it mandated the Central Organ to remain seized of the matter and to take decisions as appropriate, in accordance with the requirements of the situation. Secondly, the Assembly requested the Current Chairman and I to convene as a matter of urgency, a meeting of the political leaders of Burundi in Addis Ababa, where they could discuss the future of their country. The meeting was to have taken the leaders of Political Parties and other important actors out of the political environment in Burundi and bringing them together here in Addis Ababa and challenging them to a decisive dialogue aimed at ending the political paralysis in the country and paving the way for national reconciliation and peace.

Pursuant to that decision, the dates of 27-28 July 1995 were proposed for the meeting, and a delegation led by my Special Representative was despatched to Burundi to extend invitations in the name of the Current Chairman and in my own name, to the political actors of Burundi. In addition to the sending of my Special Representative, I had the opportunity to consult with some of the political leaders of Burundi. In my discussions with them, as well as through the message conveyed to them in Bujumbura through my Special Representative, I underlined the importance of the Addis Ababa Meeting, both as a continuation of the political dialogue among the protagonists in Burundi, and as a response to the call made by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. I also expressed my view that the meeting was to be part of the process of dialogue which the OAU has strived to sustain throughout the period of its involvement in Burundi. I also told them that as a political process, the meeting had to have the support and understanding of those who are most directly involved - namely, the leaders of Burundi.

I am sure you are all familiar now with the reaction of the leaders of Burundi to our invitation. While I received a positive response from the Majority Parties, the Opposition Parties did not agree to the meeting being held outside Burundi. The opposition parties did however agree to the principle of such a meeting.

Due to this divergence of view, it was not possible to convene the meeting as was anticipated. It is my firm conviction that even though that meeting was not expected to resolve all the problems of Burundi, it would have provided a good beginning for the process of dialogue and lessening the tension that is so pervasive in Burundi. The meeting which was to have been chaired by the Current Chairman of our Organization, the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi would have addressed itself to some of the burning issues confronting the Burundi Society. These include how to end violence and insecurity, the implementation of the Convention of Government, the restoration of peace on the basis of confidence building and forging national reconciliation.

At this juncture, I believe it is important to restate the fact that the only agenda of the OAU in Burundi, is to help bring about the restoration of peace, stability, national reconciliation and the economic regeneration of that country so that all the people of Burundi could concentrate their energies on the promotion of economic growth in a safe and secure environment. In this regard, therefore, the one thing that the OAU can not afford to do, is to keep quiet and to remain indifferent to the killing of innocent people in Burundi and to the disturbing security situation in that country and the region as a whole.

It was against this backdrop, that the Current Chairman and I decided to despatch a special delegation to the countries neighbouring Burundi and to Burundi itself, to obtain from the Region's leaders, ideas on what more could be done to unblock the peace process, to sustain the momentum of the Addis Ababa Summit, as well as to promote the cause of peace and stability in the region. The OAU delegation visited Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Zaire and Burundi itself. Furthermore, while in Dar es Salaam, I myself had the opportunity to hold discussions with some leaders of the opposition on the proposed Addis Ababa meeting.

The outcome of those consultations have been reflected in the Report which is before you. The Report also contains some specific recommendations for the consideration of this Extra-Ordinary Session. In its consultations in the region, the delegation found broad agreement on the need to take measures to implement the Assembly decision. It also found shared anxiety over the precarious political situation in Burundi and thus the need to take appropriate action to arrest it before it degenerates further. In Burundi, however, the delegation was unable to secure the agreement of the opposition parties to the holding of the meeting in Addis Ababa. They continue to insist that such a meeting should be held in Burundi.

It is my fervent hope that you will examine the report as well as the recommendations critically and at the end of the day, through our inter reaction, concrete ideas would emerge on what more can be done to contribute to bringing about a durable solution to the looming catastrophe in Burundi. I wish, in this respect, to reiterate my appreciation to the Prime Minister of Burundi for his presence here today. I am convinced that his contribution will help us in our collective efforts to assist Burundi.

Mr. Chairman,

Honorable Heads of Delegations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I speak to you now, Burundi remains in a state of tension and uncertainties, despite the existence of the Convention of Government which is a power-sharing framework. Even though it would be too simplistic and indeed incorrect to view the problem purely in ethnic terms, the fact remains, that there is an increasing and dangerous polarization of the Burundi society along ethnic lines. There is deep distrust and mutual suspicion. There is considerable uncertainty about Burundi's political future. Inevitably, and as a direct consequence of this state of affairs, the population in Burundi seems to be caught in a syndrome of suspicion and cynicism. This situation has been

compounded by the killings of innocent civilians including women and children which occur with increasing regularity. In some provinces of Burundi including the capital Bujumbura, the sense of insecurity had at one time reached new heights. Moderate politicians who hold the key to a peaceful settlement are under pressure, while extremists on both sides prepare for what they perceive as the inevitable showdown.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me at this juncture touch on one area which though most critical to the restoration of peace in Burundi, has received the least attention. I refer to the urgent need to undertake a programme of Social and Economic Reconstruction and Development of Burundi. Available statistics have shown beyond all doubt, that in addition to causing incalculable human suffering, the killings, material destruction and population upheavals have seriously disrupted administrative and other services, as well as damaged the economy, resulting in further adverse effects on the population, particularly in such fields as health and education. These worsening economic and social conditions serve to exacerbate further the communal tensions and deepen the state of insecurity.

I cannot end my remarks without referring to the concerns which have been expressed by countries of the region on the continued instability and security challenges posed by the presence of hundreds of thousands of Rwandese and Burundian refugees in the different countries neighbouring Burundi. I have already launched an appeal for more international assistance to both the countries of asylum and the countries of origin, to enable the appropriate mechanisms to be put in place for an orderly repatriation and resettlement of refugees in the Great Lakes Region. It goes without saying that the unique problems posed by these refugees will remain a source of destabilization of not just Burundi and Rwanda, but the Region as a whole. It is thus urgent that the decisions and recommendations of the International Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons of the Countries of the Great Lakes held in Bujumbura earlier this year are implemented without delay.

Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Heads of Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we deliberate on the Burundi situation, we should bear in mind the mandate entrusted by the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government to the Central Organ, the Current Chairman and the Secretary General. On the one hand, the Assembly requested the Central Organ to remain seized of the matter and to take whatever decisions that are appropriate to avert the further deterioration of the situation. On the other hand, the Assembly entrusted the Current Chairman and I to convene a meeting of the political actors in Burundi. As I reported to you, we have not been able so far to hold such a meeting.

I believe that notwithstanding the present difficulties, we should still aim at getting the parties around the table and to dialogue. We should build upon the agreement in principle to the meeting bearing in mind that it will be a process and not one event encounter. In this respect, I am encouraged that in its consultations with the countries of the region, the OAU mission found broad agreement on the need of expanding and deepening the process of coordination

and consultation. To this end, we need to look at how this process of consultation and coordination can be enhanced so as to apply it more creatively and effectively to the task of promoting dialogue and political accommodation in Burundi. In this process, the region could also try to bring its full support to the implementation of the Assembly decision. We should also consider the possibility of utilizing the services of elder statesmen and eminent personalities to help, drawing upon their experience and their political and moral weight to bear upon the process of political dialogue in Burundi. In all this the OAU and the United Nations should ^{WORK} ~~look~~ very closely. And in this connection I am pleased to recognize the presence and participation in our deliberations of the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General for Burundi.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to reiterate OAU's disposition and commitment to help in the efforts to restore confidence and national reconciliation in Burundi. Our efforts should be understood in their proper perspective by all the political actors in Burundi. OAU shall not leave a stone unturned in its efforts to promote dialogue between the political actors in Burundi. I believe this disposition of our continental Organization should inspire and encourage the political leaders in Burundi to work together toward peace in their country. I am afraid that, if the leaders of Burundi do not transcend their differences and do not work together within the framework of the

Convention of Government which they have agreed upon, the field would be left for those who are preparing themselves for a solution through confrontation and violence and the risk of further degeneration of the situation with its far reaching implications for peace, security and stability in Burundi and the region as a whole. The OAU firmly supports the Convention of Government as providing the most appropriate framework, under the circumstances, towards peace, stability and national reconciliation. We urge all the signatories of the Convention to work for its implementation.

I believe the Central Organ should encourage the vigorous pursuit of all peaceful options aimed at restoring peace, stability and national reconciliation in Burundi. This is the preferred path. It is the rational path. It is the path that we should invest our energies, ideas and resources. At the same time, in keeping with the spirit and content of the discussion and decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the Central Organ must make it clear that Africa and the international community cannot and will not stand idly by and see yet another major catastrophe in the sub-region. The Central Organ should consequently remain vigilant against any dramatic deterioration of the situation.