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STATEMENT BY THE OAU SECRETARY-GENERAL

H.E. MR SALIM AHMED SALIM

AT THE 15TH ORDINARY SESSION

OF THE OAU LABOUR COMMISSION

Addis Ababa, 15 May, 1992.

MR CHAIRMAN,
YOUR EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
OF THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS,
INVITED GUESTS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

IT IS A PLEASURE FOR ME TO PARTICIPATE, FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME SINCE I ASSUMED OFFICE, AS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU, IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE OAU LABOUR COMMISSION. I AM PARTICULARLY DELIGHTED THAT HIS EXCELLENCY MR TAMIRAT LAYNE, PRIME MINISTER OF THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA, HAS KINDLY ACCEPTED TO JOIN US DESPITE HIS HEAVY SCHEDULE OF DUTIES. I WOULD LIKE ALSO TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION AT THE PRESENCE, AT THIS MEETING, OF THE DISTINGUISHED MINISTERS AS WELL AS THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF ILO, THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE ARAB LABOUR ORGANIZATION AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ALL AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS UNITY.

MR CHAIRMAN,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

IN CONFORMITY WITH TRADITIONAL PRACTICE AND PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 8, OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE LABOUR COMMISSION, THIS SESSION WOULD HAVE BEEN HELD IN APRIL. ALL ARRANGEMENTS HAD BEEN MADE AND THIS CONFERENCE HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR 23-28 APRIL, 1992, WITH DUE ACCOUNT TAKEN OF THE RAMADAN, EASTER AND LABOUR DAY CELEBRATIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO CONVENE

IT BEFORE NOW DUE TO DIFFICULTIES OF SECURING MEETING HALLS. WHILE I AM AWARE OF THE INCONVENIENCE THIS DELAY IS LIKELY TO HAVE CAUSED, I AM CONVINCED, NONETHELESS, THAT IT WILL STILL BE POSSIBLE, FOR THIS COMMISSION, TO CARRY OUT A REVIEW OF ALL THE ISSUES OF CONCERN TO OUR STATES IN LABOUR MATTERS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND TO ADOPT AN AFRICAN COMMON POSITION IN PREPARATION FOR THE FORTHCOMING ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION.

MR CHAIRMAN,

THE AGENDA SUBMITTED TO THIS SESSION AND THE RELEVANT WORKING DOCUMENTS DO REFLECT SOME OF THESE CONCERNS AND NO DOUBT CONSTITUTE AN ADEQUATE BASIS FOR THE FRUITFUL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES WHICH WOULD HOPEFULLY CULMINATE IN APPROPRIATE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT INCORPORATE BOTH THE REALITIES OF AFRICA AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

YOU WILL RECALL, IN THIS REGARD, THAT DURING YOUR LAST SESSION IN BLANTYRE, MALAWI, LAST YEAR, YOU ADOPTED A NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH FOCUSED MAINLY ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF YOUR COMMISSION INTO A TRIPARTITE BODY, ON THE EMPLOYMENT CRISIS IN AFRICA, TRAINING IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING IN THE FIELD OF LABOUR. ONE OF THE REPORTS BEING SUBMITTED FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION PROVIDES A DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE SECRETARIAT WITH A VIEW TO IMPLEMENTING YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS. MOREOVER, YOUR LABOUR EXPERTS HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITY TO DELIBERATE ON THE ENTIRE RANGE OF ISSUES. THE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF THESE DELIBERATIONS ARE BEING TABLED BEFORE YOU FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION AS RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS COMMISSION.

MR CHAIRMAN,

YOUR COMMISSION IS MEETING AT A TIME WHEN THE CONTINENT IS STILL GOING THROUGH SERIOUS ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, NOTWITHSTANDING THE MINIMAL GROWTH LEVELS RECORDED IN THE COURSE OF THE LAST TWO YEARS IN MANY COUNTRIES. THE CRISIS NOW GRIPPING OUR COUNTRIES HAS UNDERMINED DEVELOPMENT WITH THE RESULTANT STAGNATION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, LOSS OF INVESTMENT AND JOBS. TODAY, MILLIONS OF OUR YOUTH ARE WITHOUT JOBS AND, UNLESS THERE ARE EFFORTS AT SUSTAINED ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND GROWTH, THEY WILL CONTINUE TO LIVE ON THE FRINGE OF SOCIETY. TO SPUR RECOVERY AND GROWTH AND TO CREATE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYMENT WILL REQUIRE A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND LABOUR. THIS COOPERATION WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO HARNESS THE CREATIVITY AND THE INDUSTRY OF ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY IN ALL ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, INCLUDING THE INFORMAL SECTOR. A GENERALIZED ECONOMIC RECOVERY WILL EXPAND THE JOB MARKET AND FACILITATE GREATER LABOUR MOBILITY WITHIN OUR COUNTRIES.

MR CHAIRMAN,

BUT EVEN BEFORE WE GET TO THE POINT OF RECOVERY, WE NEED TO EXAMINE THE SITUATION AS IT NOW OBTAINS ON THE CONTINENT. THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PREVAILING STATE OF AFFAIRS HAVE BEEN HORRENDOUS. UNEMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL IDLENESS AMONG THE

YOUTH HAS LED TO FRUSTRATION, AND ALIENATION, TO EXPERIMENTATION WITH DRUGS, AND DRUG ADDICTION AND EVENTUALLY INTO CRIME. THIS BREAK DOWN OF SOCIAL MORALITY, AS A CONSEQUENCE OF LACK OF OPPORTUNITY WITHIN SOCIETY, IS A SCOURGE WHICH, IF UNCHECKED, THREATENS TO CRIPPLE OUR SOCIETIES TERMINALLY. THE EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT APART, WE, THEREFORE, NEED TO EXPLORE WAYS IN WHICH GOVERNMENTS CAN ADDRESS THE ADVERSE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THESE PROBLEMS. LABOUR HAS A DUTY TO PLAY ITS PART IN THIS COMMON CHALLENGE.

THE CONFLICTS IN AFRICA HAVE HAD AN EQUALLY DEBILITATING EFFECTS ON THE LABOUR SITUATION ON THE CONTINENT. WARS HAVE DISRUPTED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, THUS EFFECTIVELY SHUTTING THE LABOUR MARKET; NOT TO SPEAK OF THE DEATH OF MANY PRODUCTIVE MEN AND WOMEN.

MR CHAIRMAN,

OF COURSE, AFRICA IS DEPLOYING CONCERTED EFFORTS TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO ALL THESE PROBLEMS. THE STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS, WHICH ARE NOW IN PLACE, AND THE RESOLVE TO TACKLE THE SCOURGE OF CONFLICTS, CHARACTERIZE A NEW DETERMINATION IN THE CONTINENT. IN ADDITION, THE STEADY CONVERSION TO POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES ARE AIMED AT INTEGRATING PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT. THE PROCESS OF THE FURTHER DEMOCRATIZATION OF OUR SOCIETIES IS PART OF THIS RENEWED DETERMINATION OF THE CONTINENT TO PUT ITS HOUSE IN ORDER. FOR ULTIMATELY IF WE CAN INVOLVE THE PEOPLE CENTRALLY IN THE

DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF GOVERNMENTS, CONSOLIDATE DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN OUR COUNTRIES, WE WILL BE ABLE TO BUILD A BASIS FOR PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENTS TO HALT AND REVERSE THE TREND OF ECONOMIC DECLINE ON THE CONTINENT. IT IS ONLY IN TACKLING THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM OF POVERTY ON THE CONTINENT THAT WE CAN FIND SOLUTION TO THE ISSUES OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT.

MR CHAIRMAN,

IT IS IN REALIZATION OF THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT THAT, AT ITS FOURTEENTH SESSION, THIS COMMISSION RECOMMENDED THE ADOPTION OF A DECLARATION ON THE EMPLOYMENT CRISIS IN AFRICA. I AM HAPPY TO INFORM YOU THAT THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT, AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE SUMMIT, IN ABUJA, NIGERIA, DID INDEED ADOPT THE DECLARATION IN WHICH THEY CLEARLY EXPRESS CONCERN AT THE RISE IN UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT COUPLED WITH THE DECLINE IN REVENUES AND AN OVERALL INCREASE IN POVERTY WHICH SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZES THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STABILITY OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

BY ADOPTING THE DECLARATION, THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT PLEDGED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, TO EXTEND GREATER PRIORITY TO THE SETTLEMENT OF THE CRISIS BY ALLOCATING MORE RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYMENT PROMOTION PURPOSES IN THEIR NATIONAL BUDGETS. I DO BELIEVE THAT WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF EACH AND EVERYONE OF YOU AND WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, THIS IMPORTANT AND SALUTARY COMMITMENT ENTERED INTO

BY THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT WILL BE RAPIDLY TRANSLATED INTO REALITY.

IT IS IN THIS RESPECT THAT YOUR DECISION TO TRANSFORM THE OAU LABOUR COMMISSION INTO A TRIPARTITE BODY INCORPORATING REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENT, MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR IN ONE AND THE SAME NATIONAL DELEGATION TAKES ON FULL SIGNIFICANCE. INDEED, TODAY, THE PARTICIPATION OF LABOUR AND MANAGEMENT, IN A SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY AND DIALOGUE, IS VITAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRIES AND OF OUR CONTINENT. THIS PATH IS, IN MY VIEW, THE ONLY ONE THAT WOULD ALLOW ALL SEGMENTS OF OPINION TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY AND MAKE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN IN AN ORDERLY MANNER AND WITH RESPECT FOR THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS. IT IS ALSO ONE WAY OF CHANNELLING THE ASPIRATIONS AND EVENTUALLY THE LEGITIMATE DEMANDS OF THE POPULATION SINCE IT IS EVIDENT THAT THERE CANNOT BE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ABSENCE OF DEMOCRACY AND NO LASTING DEMOCRACY WITHOUT ITS VITAL SOURCE OF SUSTENANCE WHICH IS DEVELOPMENT.

STILL ON THIS CONSTANT QUEST FOR APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS TO THE MULTIPLE PROBLEMS THAT HAUNT OUR CONTINENT, THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT DECIDED, ON THE 3RD OF JUNE 1991, IN ABUJA, TO ADOPT A TREATY ESTABLISHING THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY IN THE BELIEF THAT THE PATH TO ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IS MOST APPROPRIATE TO ENABLE OUR COUNTRIES EMERGE FROM UNDER-DEVELOPMENT. FIFTY MEMBER STATES HAVE SIGNED THIS TREATY AND EIGHT HAVE ALREADY RATIFIED IT. THIS IS EVIDENCE OF THE EVERGROWING IMPORTANCE THAT AFRICAN COUNTRIES ATTACH TO THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF OUR CONTINENT.

ITS IMPLEMENTATION IS A CHALLENGE TO ALL AFRICANS AT WHATEVER LEVEL THEY MAY BE AND PARTICULARLY TO YOU AS MINISTERS OF LABOUR AND THOSE PRIMARILY IN-CHARGE OF MOBILIZING AND USING THE HUMAN RESOURCES WHICH ARE THE PRINCIPAL TOOLS FOR INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT. MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR ALSO HAVE A MAJOR ROLE TO PLAY IN THIS PROCESS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT ONLY THE MOST EFFICIENTLY ORGANIZED AND INFORMED SOCIAL GROUP, THEY ALSO WILL BE THE GREATEST BENEFICIARIES OF A NEW AND LARGER COMMUNITY DEVOID OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE CONSTRAINTS AND RED TAPE WHICH HINDER THE FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS, GOODS AND SERVICES.

THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY WILL BE ACHIEVED IN SIX PHASES STRETCHED OVER A PERIOD OF 34 YEARS. THE FIRST PHASE, WHICH WILL LAST 5 YEARS, WILL MAINLY FOCUS ON THE STRENGTHENING OF THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROUPINGS WHICH WILL BE THE MAIN PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY.

IT IS ON THAT SCORE THAT WE HAVE INVITED SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROUPINGS TO THIS MEETING SO THAT WE CAN, TOGETHER, DELIBERATE ON THE PRACTICAL WAYS AND MEANS OF ENHANCING OUR COOPERATION IN LINE WITH THE NEW GUIDELINES. ACCORDING TO THE ABUJA TREATY, A SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL MATTERS WILL BE ESTABLISHED AND A SUPPLEMENTARY PROTOCOL TO THE TREATY WILL BE PREPARED. ALL THESE ACTIVITIES REQUIRE MORE DYNAMISM IN TERMS OF COORDINATION, COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION AMONG ALL THE PARTIES CONCERNED.

I CAN ASSURE YOU FINALLY THAT, AS FROM THE NEXT SESSION OF YOUR COMMISSION, IN APRIL 1993, THE AGENDA WILL HAVE AN ITEM WHICH WILL FIGURE PERMANENTLY. IT WILL ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY SO THAT YOUR COMMISSION WILL BE IN A POSITION TO MONITOR THE PROGRESS MADE AND PROVIDE THE REQUIRED SUPPORT IN THE PROCESS TOWARDS THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF AFRICA.

IT IS ALSO IN VIEW OF THE DESIRE TO FORGE AHEAD WITH MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY AND BETTER COORDINATION AND TO AVOID POSSIBLE DUPLICATION THAT MIGHT HAMPER OUR EFFORTS AND DELAY OUR ABILITY TO MEET OUR TARGETS THAT IT HAS BEEN DECIDED TO MERGE YOUR COMMISSION AND THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS INTO ONE AND THE SAME ANNUAL MEETING.

I WISH YOU SUCCESSFUL DELIBERATIONS.