STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU AT THE AFRICA DAY CONFERENCE ON PEACE, STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA INTO THE NEW MILLENIUM

(LANCASTER HOUSE, LONDON - 26 MAY, 1999)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank the organizers of this auspicious occasion for inviting me to participate, here in London, in the celebration of the thirty-sixth anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity. I would like to pay special tribute to the OAU Group of Heads of Mission who have deemed it fit to arrange for this conference that is devoted to the theme of "Peace, stability and Development of Africa Into the New Millenium". I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to Her Majesty's Government for their interest and support.

For the year 1999, both the celebration of the founding of our Continental Organization, and the theme of peace, stability and Development, have a special significance to the peoples of Africa and, I believe, to all our partners. This is the last occasion for

commemorating the event in this century, and indeed in this millenium. There is a special pride in reaching such a milestone. Despite the many difficulties we encountered in much of this century, the African people have come to the end of the millenium stronger in their resolve, clearer in their vision, and vigorous in their determination to build structures and institutions that will take them into the new millenium.

The theme of your conference is equally significant. Peace and stability are critical factors that impinge on the momentum for development. As Africa prepares itself to enter the new millenium it cannot avoid addressing the issues of peace and stability that seem to elude some parts of our Continent. We are all aware that conflict and insecurity cause such a profound and pervasive damage that once a society is afflicted, the recovery process is daunting and prolonged. The convening of this conference that brings together such a broad spectrum of eminent personalities is a testimony to a collective concern about the necessity to consolidate peace and stability in Africa's development.

The more than forty years of independent nationhood in Africa have seen our peoples and their governments embark into an arduous journey of building confidence, adapting inherited institutions, revitalizing systems of production and seeking for a place in world relations. Along the way, we have made some mistakes,

and some have even faltered, but the majority of our people are entering the new millenium within a path of building democratic institutions, fostering regional integration, and enhancing our capacity to engage in the globalizing world. There is an earnest commitment by the African people to take full responsibility of their destiny.

A number of our countries have embarked on major political, administrative and economic reforms.   Conscious as we are that some of the problems that bedevil our continent are of our own making, we have embarked on deliberative and sustained measures to change things. There is a genuine determination to building a culture that negates corruption and the violation of human rights. At the same time, we have created the necessary structures, at the regional and continental level, that can contribute towards preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. We have also resolved to create the African Economic Community whose building blocks are the various Regional Economic Organizations that have been making important strides in the last two decades.

The endeavour to initiate change and the betterment of our people has been severely hampered by conflicts and instability in some parts of the continent. In the last five years, slightly more than a dozen African countries were involved in some form of violent conflicts for an extended period and which have had an impact to the

overall functioning of the national systems. In places like the Great Lakes Region, almost the whole area is engulfed by conflict. In other places, like Angola and the Southern part of Sudan, the conflict has been going on for such a long duration that a whole generation of children have found themselves growing up without experiencing peace.

These conflicts generate deaths and destruction, they create suffering to the people, and they deny us an opportunity for development. These are real problems, but we have committed ourselves to seek every means to ensure that they are resolved and prevented from recurring.

In our efforts at preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, we are determined to mobilize the full potential of our continent. In the humanitarian crises that are engendered by the conflicts, women and children are the worst victims. It is therefore only proper that the full potential of the African women should be utilized in the struggle for peace and stability in the continent. This recognition of the imperative role of women is not confined to the issues of peace, security and stability by realistically speaking in all other domains. Thus as Africa prepares itself to enter the new millenium the question of the empowerment of women assumes greater relevance and urgency.

Africa also faces a serious problem of negative perception. Despite the fact that more than two-thirds of African countries have maintained relative peace and stability throughout the past decade, and about the same proportion have registered positive growth rates in economic development, the continent is still identified with generalized chaos and lack of development. The image of the whole Africa, particularly for some of our colleagues in the West, is one of rampant conflicts, general disorder, and systemic malaise. The continent is presented as a bottomless pit and a hopeless case.

It is not uncommon for such an attitude to inform development partnership and to influence foreign entrepreneurs. Instead of capitalizing and building on our developmental strength, that is dominant and which is increasingly being demonstrated, there is a disturbing tendency among our colleagues to concentrate in an exaggerated manner on the deficiencies which prevail in some of our countries.

On the part of the Organization of African Unity and our Member States, we are striving to do our best to rectify the negative perception of our Continent. We are committed to putting in place systems that are devoid of the legacies of conflict and corruption; institutions which operate along the principles of democracy and the respect of human rights. However, we also expect our friends to

assist us in forging a partnership that builds on mutual strength and dynamism. We, in Africa, have always remained clear on the essential attributes of our friends. We will never confuse between the small areas of instability, such as what prevails currently in the Balkans, and the peace and stability that exist in the rest of Europe. For us, the tragedies in Bosnia, Chechnia and now Kosovo have been understood for what they are. We have never generalised. We have never confused Bosnia or Kossovo with any European country. It will immensely help our partnership if such distinctions are made, also in reference to Africa.

I thank you all.