



Organization of African Unity

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General of the OAU
To the Special Art Exhibition by the
Ethiopian Arts School**

Congo Hall
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

May 12, 1997

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BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU
TO THE SPECIAL ART EXHIBITION
BY THE ETHIOPIAN ARTS SCHOOL,
HELD AT THE CONGO HALL (OAU)
ON MONDAY 12 MAY 1997**

Excellencies

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

High Government Officials

My dear colleagues

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me at the outset, express my great appreciation to Ato Tadesse Belayeneh, the Director of the Ethiopian Fine Arts School for the kind invitation he extended to me to declare open this Special Arts Exhibition by the School. I want to assure you all that as an Arts Lover, this task represents for me, a most pleasant duty and a welcome change from some of the activities which ordinarily preoccupy our time here at the OAU General Secretariat and elsewhere.

I therefore welcome you most heartily to the Congo Hall and sincerely hope that the significance of holding this Special Art Exhibition here at the Headquarters of our Continental Organization, will not be lost on all of us.

Speaking for the General Secretariat of the OAU, I believe it is appropriate on an occasion such as this, to reaffirm our strong support for those activities which seek to promote African Arts and contemporary culture, especially, at a time when there is a cultural re-awakening sweeping through our Continent. Such a support has been crucial not only in terms of sensitizing the International Community to the Treasures that we have all over Africa, but critical, especially as many of our Member States attempt to recover valuable Art Works and Cultural artifacts that were smuggled out of Africa, during the period of slavery and colonization in the Continent. It was within that context, that we welcomed the negotiation and the subsequent decision by the Government of Italy to return the Obelisk to its original home in Ethiopia. It is my hope and expectation, that other important African Works of Art, would similarly be returned to their original countries in Africa.

I am sure that all of you in this distinguished gathering, are aware that at the level of the OAU General Secretariat, there is ESCAS Department, which deals with Cultural issues among other things. That Department has been actively collaborating with African Artists and cultural Institutions. We remain committed to the promotion of indigenous African Arts and our contemporary culture in order to preserve them for generations of Africans and posterity. In spite of all the cultural dislocation caused to our people as a result of the ongoing conflicts in different parts of the Continent, we are determined to erase the erroneous impression of our culture and end the deliberate misinterpretation of African Arts and Culture. As Africans, we must take pride in our very rich cultural heritage which predated the unfortunate period of slavery and colonialism. It is a matter of historical record, that these two activities, more than anything else, did tremendous damage to African Arts and Culture, especially those developed in the great African Kingdoms and Empires from Cape to Cairo. I believe we now have an opportunity to correct the unfortunate events of the past. We must seize on the moment to restore the past glories of African Arts and Culture.

In this regard, I wish to congratulate the Ethiopian Fine Arts School, for its commendable efforts to consolidate the rich and diverse arts, crafts and designs found among the many cultures of Ethiopia. I am informed that in its 39 years of existence, the School had produced 508 students, with most of them having advanced and made significant contributions to the enrichment of Ethiopian Arts and designs, not just in this country, but internationally.

I am however, deeply concerned over reports of existing problems which continue to constrain the ability of the School to maintain the infrastructure needed for the achievement of the School's high objectives. It is a well-known fact that because of the creativity that they need to bring to their work artists generally require a conducive and serene environment which would bring out the best talents in them. Our young Artists in Ethiopia are not different from those found anywhere else in the world. They therefore, naturally require and deserve facilities and materials to enhance their artistic talents and preserve their creative works.

May I take the opportunity offered by this Special Exhibition, to strongly appeal to the International and diplomatic Communities, the Government and the business community in Ethiopia and beyond, to render all possible assistance to Ethiopian Fine Arts School, to enable them implement the Action Programme that has now been drawn up for the rehabilitation of the School.

I make this clarion call to all Arts lovers to support and encourage our young and budding Artists, so as to create a new pool of talents who will be able to take our rich African Arts heritage into the Twenty-First Century and beyond.

And now, Excellencies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure, to declare open, this Special Art Exhibition by the Ethiopian Fine Arts School.

Thank you