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STATEMENT OF H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY
AT THE OPENING OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE
OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF TRADE HELD IN TUNIS - TUNISIA
23 - 25 OCTOBER 1993

Mr. Chairman,
The Honourable Prime Minister
of the Republic of Tunisia,
Honourable Ministers,
Mr. Layashi Yaker, Under Secretary General
of the United Nations and Executive Secretary
of the UN Economic Commission for Africa,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by joining our hosts and the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa in welcoming you all to Tunis. You have come from the various parts of our Continent to deliberate on the performance of our countries in the area of trade. Allow me therefore to perform a pleasant duty on your behalf and express our deep gratitude to the Government and People of Tunisia for having accepted, at very short notice, to host this conference. Their acceptance to host this event to coincide with the first-ever Afro-Arab Trade Fair which just opened yesterday is a further manifestation of Tunisia's commitment to the cause of African unity and their determination to contribute to the collective efforts of Africa towards the realization of the lofty goals of Unity, Solidarity and Development.

Just last April, Tunisia hosted the Conference of African Ministers of Tourism and in June next year - inshallah - the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU will be held in this very city of Tunis. I therefore wish to put on record how grateful we all are to the Government and People of

Tunisia, for this, and characteristically, for the hospitality so far extended to us since our arrival here and the excellent facilities placed at the disposal of this conference.

Mr. Chairman,

In 1991, in view of the exigencies of developments in the Trade Sector in Africa this Conference had to meet twice. First in April in ordinary session; then in September to prepare Africa's position towards the 8th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development which took place in February 1992 in Cartagena de Indies in Colombia.

Today, as we meet to chart the course for Africa's future trade and how it would perform in the inter-play of political, economical and commercial forces of the world, we must examine recent developments in the light of decisions taken two years ago. I would wish to add that because of the speed with which events are unfolding in the world and as they bring about major and fundamental changes, we in Africa must proceed and act with speed in our affairs so as not to continue to lag behind in world affairs, and to avoid further marginalization of our countries.

**Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,**

In May this year, the OAU marked its 30th Anniversary. As we look back at Africa's economic performance, things are not very encouraging. There is still nonetheless a new determination on the part of our countries - without exception

- to reverse the trend of negative growth and to restore efficiency and productivity to their economies. Notwithstanding the enormous weight of the external debt and of the socio-economic crisis in which our countries have found themselves, they have embarked on major economic reform programmes with all the attendant dire social and political consequences. As a result of these sacrifices some of our countries have begun to record appreciable growth rates especially since the mid-80s. But Intra-African trade is still at an abysmal 5% of Africa's external trade. This of course does not take into account the unrecorded cross-border trade which is thriving between almost all the countries of the Continent. But this is not enough. Africa must begin to look seriously at how this anormally can be rectified.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Honourable Ministers will recall that after the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action, the Africa Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) was also formulated. Several other UN initiatives have failed to get off the ground. It is now amply evident that it is not the ideas nor the policies that are lacking. But it is the will to implement them. And this is where Africa needs to demonstrate greater resolve to show that we mean what we say and are determined to pursue the goals we set for ourselves. Since your last ordinary session in April 1991, the Assembly of Heads of state and Government during their session in Abuja in June 1991, signed the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Thirty-four

countries have so far ratified the Treaty and deposited their instruments of ratification with the Secretariat. We await one more ratification to enable the Treaty to enter into force.

Meanwhile, the Joint Secretariat of the OAU, ECA and ADB have proceed to draft various protocols which are to be eventually negotiated and annexed to the Treaty.

In the Trade Sector, I wish to inform you that your Ministries of Trade working within the institutions of the AEC will soon be called upon to finalize and negotiate and ultimately implement eight draft Protocols, respectively on:

Rules of Origin, Non-Tariff Barriers, Elimination of Customs Duties, Customs Cooperation, Re-exports, Intra-Community Transit Trade, the Simplification and Harmonization of Trade Documents and Procedures, and on Trade Promotion.

Furthermore, since the future African Economic Community is expected to use the existing African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocks for the continental edifice, the Joint Secretariat has already prepared a Protocol which will govern the relationship between the Community and the regional groupings.

I am happy to note that the subject of the progress made in establishing the African Economic Community has been on the agenda of the experts meeting and I am confident that at the appropriate time when their report comes for consideration, this meeting will adequately reflect on the subject.

Meanwhile, I would like to urge all of you who will be the main actors and implementors of these Protocols in the Trade and Customs sectors of the African Economic Community, to join your colleagues from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the on-going exercise of establishing the African Economic Community.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The economic imperative and the rapidly evolving events on the international scene, that compel Africa to want to create an African Economic Community should spur us on to act with resolve and determination to promote cooperation. In the Trade Sector, in order to successfully create our African Common Market, we believe that the ongoing All-Africa Trade Fair which was established since 1972 - aiming at promoting commercial and economic links between our countries will go a long way towards enhancing Africa's prospects for economic growth and development. It will enable our countries to know each other, to know what we produce and what we can exchange and how we can trade. It is only through such interaction of commerce and industry that we can learn from each other and know our potential. All too often we are unable to trade with each other because we do not know each other. If we manage to bring down the barriers which separate us, we will have begun on the road of sustained links of cooperation especially in trade and commerce.

The promotion of intra-African trade leads me to state the need to simultaneously promote South-South Trade and Economic Cooperation. The holding of the First Afro-Arab Trade Fair here in Tunis which transcends Africa's frontiers to countries of the middle East fulfills the dreams of the proponents of South-South Cooperation. This event is politically significant because it is taking place at a time when the bonds of solidarity in the South - exemplified by the Group of 77 - have been seriously eroded. It is the concrete events like the Afro-arab Trade Fair or a possible future South Fair which would bring practical expression to the many years of South-South solidarity. I say so because I am aware that most of you were in Cartagena de Indies in Colombia, where for the first time the Group of 77 abandoned its traditional negotiating strategy of speaking through one spokesman in its negotiations with the countries of the industrial North. This change of strategy has resulted in more emphasis being placed on the need to articulate, much more forcefully, regional interests and concerns. There are advantages and disadvantages to such a development. Perhaps distinguished Ministers, at this session of Your Conference, you may wish to take cognisance of these developments and evolve appropriate strategies.

Mr. Chairman,

At this juncture, I would like to state that all the hopes and aspirations for intra-African trade and economic development of our countries can only be realized if **PEACE** reigns on the African continent. If we look at the conflictual situations of our Continent, they call for urgent

attention. That is why the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU did adopt in Cairo, in June this year, a Declaration on the **"Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution"** as an instrument to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa. The Mechanism is intended to empower Africa and through the OAU, to enable it play the determinant role in the search for solutions to the many conflicts which have bled the Continent and wasted so much resources. The overriding conviction of Africa, in adopting the Mechanism, is that unless Africa, herself, demonstrates in practical terms that it cares about the death and suffering of Africans, and is therefore prepared to act and act decisively, the rest of the world cannot be expected to take the Continent seriously. Today, we cannot talk of trade, of economic integration in conflict situations such as in Somalia, Angola or Liberia. We cannot talk of development when Africans are at war with each other and when millions continue to drift across the Continent as refugees or displaced persons. We need to re-establish peace and stability before we can speak of economic reconstruction and development.

Since the adoption of the Mechanism in June this year, progress has been made to give operational life to it. It is my fervent hope that it would soon be fully operational and that it would contribute to the avoidance of tragedies that we have witnessed in Somalia, Angola and Liberia just to cite a few cases.

Prevention of such tragedies is of primordial importance. And that is precisely why I am compelled before concluding my statement to refer to the tragic events of the last 48 hours in Burundi.

For while we continue to make efforts geared at preserving or restoring peace and stability in our continent by inter alia, supporting the democratization process in our continent, it is a matter of profound sadness and indeed indignation that we have followed the events unfolding in Burundi. There the verdict of the people so eloquently demonstrated in the country's Presidential and Legislative Elections have been arbitrarily flouted by a military take over. This has already led to the shattering of the hopes and expectation of the people of that country. It is our earnest hope that the situation will not be allowed to deteriorate further and in the process further jeopardizing the prospects of national reconciliation.

Mr. Chairman,

I thought it only proper to make use of this first major gathering of African Ministers since the deplorable events of Burundi, to air my concerns and those of our continental organization. What has happened in Burundi constitutes a serious blow to the process of democratization not only in that country but also to Africa as a whole. The Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution meeting in an Emergency session yesterday afternoon at OAU Headquarters in Addis Ababa in addition to condemning the coup, inter alia declared as follows :

"At a time when Africa is undergoing the process of democratization and political renewal, it is unacceptable that the will of the people expressed through the ballot should fall victim to the power of the gun".

Mr. Chairman,
Hon. Prime Minister,

Our continent and our peoples are determined to pursue the path of democratization embodying good governance, accountability, transparency and the empowerment of our people. These are conditions prerequisite for genuine socio-economic development of our societies. For we cannot expect the genuine improvement of the lot of our peoples if our countries remain victims of instability and chaos. This is precisely why our leaders meeting at the Summit in Addis Ababa in 1990 called for further democratization of our societies and greater respect for human rights. And despite shortcomings here and there, it is an established fact that Africa has been clearly on the move towards this direction. In so doing Africa has been making use of its own relevant experiences including its rich cultural and traditional heritage. What makes the coup in Bujumbura such an abomination is that it utterly and callously defies this trend as it contemptuously disregards the will and rights of the people of that country. At the very least Africa and Africans must not view this development with indifference.

I thank you.

