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**ADDRESS OF H.E. THE SECRETARY GENERAL, ON THE OCCASION
OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD,
AFRICA HALL, ECA ON 16 JUNE 1995**

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It is a great honour as it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to Africa Hall this afternoon on this momentous occasion when we are commemorating the Day of the African Child.

We are all assembled here today not to celebrate, but to commemorate this important Day of 16th June, as the "**Day of the African Child**". This day was specifically set aside as a result of the decision of the 26th Session of the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government which called for the commemoration of the Day in memory of the 1976 Soweto Massacre of innocent children, perpetrated by the then Apartheid Regime of South Africa. It is encouraging to note that the commemoration of the Day of the African Child is not restricted to the African Continent only. Indeed, many other countries worldwide, are interested in and concerned about the welfare of the African children and join with us each year on the 16th of June to commemorate the Day of the African Child. Thus, in such countries and places like Canada, USA, Australia, the United Nations Headquarters and elsewhere, the mayors of many cities are commemorating with us the Day of the African Child.

I recall that in my address on this occasion to the children two years ago in the Congo Hall at the OAU Headquarters, I emphasized that our Organization, in collaboration with child-friendly Organizations as well as those of us entrusted with carrying out the aims and objectives of the OAU were and are relentlessly endeavouring to devise and pursue meaningful and context-specific programmes that are destined to guarantee the safety, welfare, rights, survival,

protection and development of children in Africa. These were the major goals to which our Leaders committed themselves when they made the decision to set aside this important Day to be commemorated on the 16th of June of each year. In addition, that decision was intended to pay homage and tribute to those innocent children who had been murdered in cold blood in one of Africa's protracted but legitimate struggles for liberation. The fact that children are the continent's precious resource in that they represent Africa's future cannot be overemphasized. Hence, Africa's future depends on how well its children are brought up, protected, nurtured, educated and prepared to face the multifarious challenges the Continent is experiencing as we enter the 21st Century and beyond.

I now wish to pay tribute to and congratulate the UNICEF, with which we are co-organizing this Day, for its commendable role and contribution towards the alleviation of the plight of African children. We of the OAU recall with satisfaction that since the decision of the UN General Assembly to designate 1979 as the "International Year of the Child", greater awareness and concern for the plight of children worldwide was set in motion. Since then, various fora have been organized nationally, regionally and internationally with the sole purpose of bettering the welfare of the children. In this regard, special mention should be made of the 1990 World Summit which was specifically devoted to the Survival, Protection and Development of the world's children. In view of the socio-economic crisis that continues to ravage our continent, special emphasis was laid on the need for ensuring a better growing environment for the African child. This was on the realization that the majority of African children were living in conditions of absolute poverty characterized by the chilling fact that over 4.5 million were dying each year, largely from preventable

diseases. A further 30 million continued to suffer from the effects of intra-African wars and civil strife, while millions more continued to be denied adequate nutrition, rudimentary health services, clean water, shelter, proper sanitation and basic education. Indeed the disadvantages caused by lack or denial of these very basic needs of life have had serious consequences on the well-being of the children.

It was in serious recognition and appreciation of these children's problems in Africa that the OAU, in collaboration with UNICEF, convened an International Conference on Assistance to African children in Dakar, Senegal, in 1992. Indeed, that conference was aimed at not only drawing global attention to the plight of African children, but also to seeking additional support for Africa so as to enable it address its socio-economic problems, particularly those related to the children and their mothers.

In addition to the problems arising from absolute poverty and its effects on innocent children in the continent, Africa has had to come to grips with another problem or evil whose repercussions have exacerbated the situation of African children. Thus, despite the efforts made to uphold the commitments of the World Summit and of the International Conference on Assistance to African children, all African efforts to improve the situation of children have been thwarted or adversely affected by the escalating conflicts in the Continent. Wars and conflicts have above all other dangers and problems, continued to cause untold misery to the African children. The trauma of losing one's parents, relatives or friends and turning healthy and hopeful children into despondent and traumatized orphans should be taken into serious consideration by any peace loving person in Africa and indeed elsewhere in the world.

It was in recognition of the deleterious consequences of these intra-African wars and civil strife that the African Leaders established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Resolution and Management in 1992 in order to bring PEACE in our continent.

In order to guarantee African children a future, we must build for a peaceful future by inculcating into our children the benefits and importance of working for, attaining and maintaining peace. This can be done by Peace Education, developing and building a culture of tolerance of other people's ethnic extraction, beliefs, religion, colour and general outlook to life. However, peace education should not be restricted to children only but also to the youth and adults. Peace education should be a lifelong process in the family, in the schools and universities, in local communities, community organizations, places of worship, in the work places, unions, labour and professional organizations, in the halls of government and diplomacy, in intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In short, peace education can and should be part of every structure and process through which people and societies learn and conduct their public affairs.

Every child present here represents thousands of other children in Africa. The moving testimony given here by Gabriel Tut and Fardosa Aboubacar from Sudan and Somalia respectively, are a reflection of the problems and tragedies which have afflicted and continue to afflict hundreds of thousands of children caught in areas of conflict in our continent. Gabriel and Fardosa despite their great personal misfortune are among the lucky ones. They are alive and are happily here with us. (Indeed in talking to them I have discovered that any one of them can at sometime in the future take my position as

Secretary General of the OAU). But we must remember as we celebrate this day, that there are thousands of Gabriels and Fardosas who have simply not made it. All African children have a right to life, survival, protection and development. Their message to us both as leaders, parents and well-wishers is simple but loud and clear, namely that we **STOP THE WAR: GIVE AFRICA'S CHILDREN A CHANCE AND A FUTURE**. This is what they are innocently but legitimately whispering to each leader and parent and in fact to all fellow Africans. It therefore behoves us all to answer the children's call positively by ensuring that the next time we commemorate this Day, the children's message of today will not merely ring in our ears again momentarily, but instead, the children's call will have been borne out by the positive fruits of "**A PEACEFUL AFRICA**" which is the only guarantee for our children's future.

I thank you for your attention.