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ADDRESS BY THE OAU SECRETARY-GENERAL

H.E. MR SALIM AHMED SALIM

AT THE 18TH MEETING

OF THE ECA CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS

Addis Ababa, 20 April, 1992.

YOUR EXCELLENCY MR TAMERATE LAYNE
PRIME MINISTER OF THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA,
YOUR EXCELLENCY MR ISSA DIALLO
THE ACTING EXECUTIVE-SECRETARY OF ECA,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

IT IS FOR ME A SPECIAL HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE TO ADDRESS
THE CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING IN AFRICA, WHICH IS MEETING UNDER THE
AUSPICES OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA.
I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY SPECIAL THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO
H.E. TAMERATE LAYNE, THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE TRANSITIONAL
GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA, FOR HIS IMPORTANT OPENING ADDRESS THAT
WILL SERVE AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION THROUGHOUT THE DELIBERATIONS
AT THIS CONFERENCE.

I AM ALSO GRATEFUL TO MY BROTHER AND COLLEAGUE, ISSA
DIALLO, THE ACTING EXECUTIVE-SECRETARY OF ECA, FOR INVITING ME
TO ADDRESS THIS 18TH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE. MR DIALLO'S
INCISIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN AFRICA SETS
THE TONE FOR THIS CONFERENCE. MR DIALLO FOLLOWS, IN THE GREAT
TRADITION OF HIS PREDECESSORS, IN CONTINUING TO SEE THE IMPERATIVE
OF PROMOTING THE COOPERATION WHICH HAS HAPPILY EXISTED BETWEEN
THE OAU AND THE COMMISSION. I AM HAPPY TO SAY THAT, SINCE HIS
ARRIVAL, HE HAS SPARED NO EFFORT IN ENSURING THAT THAT
COOPERATION IS CONSOLIDATED.

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,

IN THE RECENT PAST, MAJOR EVENTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN OUR CONTINENT AND ELSEWHERE, WITH FAR REACHING REPERCUSSIONS ON THE WAY AND MANNER THAT WE CONDUCT OUR AFFAIRS, AND WITH SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRIES. JUST UNDER A YEAR AGO, ON 3RD JUNE 1991, TO BE PRECISE, AFRICAN LEADERS SIGNED, IN ABUJA, THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY. THIS WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF THEIR COMMITMENT TO WORK MORE ASSIDUOUSLY TOWARDS THE TOTAL ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE FOR THE CONTINENT. ALL OVER AFRICA, THERE IS AN IRREVERSIBLE TIDE TOWARDS INVOLVING MORE INTEGRALLY THE ENTIRE AFRICAN SOCIETY IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA AND ENSURING AN EFFECTIVE, POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE MAKING OF DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THE LIVES AND WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE.

ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, OUR LEADERS HAVE STEPPED UP EFFORTS TOWARDS FINDING EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICTS IN THE CONTINENT. THE EVENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA HAVE GIVEN RISE TO OPTIMISM THAT THE COUNTRY MAY ULTIMATELY BREAK LOOSE THE SHACKLES OF RACISM AND REIMERGE AS A POSITIVE FORCE IN THE HUMAN AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTINENT.

IN HIS ADDRESS, THE ACTING EXECUTIVE-SECRETARY HAS NOT ONLY ANALYSED THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE CONTINENT BUT HAS PRESENTED HIS VISION OF THE STRATEGY AND POSTURE THAT THE ECA SHOULD ADOPT, IN ORDER FOR THE COMMISSION TO BETTER ANTICIPATE AND DEAL WITH FUTURE CHALLENGES THAT WILL FACE AFRICA. ON MY PART, I CERTAINLY WELCOME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE WITH

AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MAJOR ISSUES THAT OUR COUNTRIES AND, INDEED AFRICA, ARE CONFRONTED WITH.

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
EXCELLENCIES,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,

CERTAIN TERMINOLOGIES AND EXPRESSIONS ARE GRADUALLY GAINING ACCEPTANCE BUT WITHOUT A SERIOUS CHALLENGE AS TO THEIR EXACT MEANING; TERMS AS «MARGINALIZATION», «AFRICA IS BEING FORGOTTEN» OR «AFRICA IS NOT OR NO LONGER A PRIORITY» ! WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THAT ONLY AFRICA CAN MARGINALIZE ITSELF AND THAT AFRICA HAS NEVER REALLY BEEN A PRIORITY FOR ANYONE. IT WOULD BE SELF-DELUING ON OUR PART TO THINK THAT OUR INTERESTS TALLY WITH THOSE OF THE COUNTRIES WE LOOK UP TO, FOR ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT. OUR COUNTRIES HAVE TO RECOGNIZE AND UNDERSTAND THE CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS, THE CHANGE OF ALLIANCES AND SHIFTS OF EMPHASIS IN ORDER, FOR US, TO DRAW UP A NEW STRATEGY FOR OUR CONTINENT'S SURVIVAL. THIS IS WHY I WOULD WANT TO INSIST THAT, INSPITE OF THE PROBLEMS FACING AFRICA, WE MUST FORGE AHEAD WITH THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRIES AS A MATTER OF EXTREME PRIORITY, RECOGNIZING THAT OUR FATE LIES ENTIRELY IN OUR OWN HANDS.

THIS ASSERTION IS BY NO MEANS TO BELITTLE THE SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS FACING OUR COUNTRIES OR TO SUGGEST THAT AFRICA CAN TACKLE THEM CONCLUSIVELY ON ITS OWN. CERTAINLY, WE SHALL NEED THE COOPERATION WITH AND ASSISTANCE OF THE

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. BUT THAT ASSISTANCE OR COOPERATION WILL HAVE TO BE SUPPLEMENTARY TO OUR OWN EFFORTS. CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME. WE SHALL, THEREFORE, HAVE TO DEMONSTRATE OUR OWN RESOLVE TO MOUNT A UNITED AFFRONT TO OUR CONTINENT'S POVERTY AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT BEFORE WE CAN RIGHTFULLY EXPECT INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY.

THROUGHOUT THE DECADE OF THE EIGHTIES AND UP TILL NOW, THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE HAS BEEN GENERALLY POOR WITH GLOOMY PROSPECTS FOR MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. THE 1992 ECONOMIC REPORT HAS SHOWN CLEARLY THAT THE TREND OF DECLINING OR STAGNANT GDP AND PER CAPITA IS CONTINUING AND THAT EXCRUCIATING DEBT BURDEN COUPLED WITH REDUCED EXTERNAL RESOURCE FLOWS HAS WEAKENED FURTHER AFRICA'S EFFORT AT BROADENING THE PRODUCTIVE BASE, IMPROVING AND BROADENING THE BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND BRINGING ABOUT ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION. APART FROM THE TOTAL OUTSTANDING DEBT OF OVER 275 US BILLION DOLLARS, THE HUGE DEBT SERVICE OF 26 BILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY AND AFRICA'S CLEAR INABILITY TO MEET SUCH HEAVY OBLIGATIONS, THERE IS THE SERIOUS CONCERN THAT OUR COUNTRIES HAVE SEEMINGLY LOST INTEREST AND ENTHUSIASM TO DISCUSS THIS PROBLEM AND THAT ALL SOLUTIONS SO FAR PROFFERED HAVE HAD MINIMAL IMPACT. WE APPEAR TO HAVE LOST THE INITIATIVE OF 1984 AND 1987 WHEN THE AFRICAN MINISTERS OF FINANCE AND THE OAU SUMMIT, RESPECTIVELY, MET IN EXTRAORDINARY SESSIONS TO DISCUSS EXCLUSIVELY THE CONTINENT'S DEBT CRISIS. EQUALLY DISTURBING IS AFRICA'S INABILITY TO REACT COLLECTIVELY TO MANY INITIATIVES BY THE CREDITORS SUCH AS THOSE OF TORONTO, TRINIDAD.

THERE IS ALSO THE PROBLEM OF AFRICAN COMMODITIES, PARTICULARLY THE COLLAPSE IN THEIR PRICES AND CONSEQUENT REDUCED EXPORT VOLUMES AND EARNINGS AND THE SEVERE COMPETITION FROM SYNTHETIC SUBSTITUTES AND FROM OTHER PRODUCERS. WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THAT WHATEVER SOLUTION MAY COME IN FUTURE WILL NOT BE SUCH AS TO RESTORE COMMODITY PRICES TO THE LEVELS OF THE 1960'S NOR WILL AFRICA'S TOTAL EXPORT EARNINGS BE COMMENSURATE WITH THE CONTINENT'S REQUIREMENT FOR ACCELERATED SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION. AFRICA MUST NOW RETHINK ITS FUTURE STRATEGY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT AS A TOP PRIORITY ITEM ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA AND INVOLVING ALL ARMS OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND ALL STRATA OF THE AFRICAN SOCIETY.

MR CHAIRMAN,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS,

AFRICA CANNOT BE DESPONDENT NOR CAN IT AFFORD TO WAIT FOR A MORE FAVOURABLE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT WHEN THERE WOULD BE BETTER PRICES FOR ITS EXPORTS, WHEN ITS EXTERNAL DEBT CRISIS WOULD BE A THING OF THE PAST OR WHEN THE AVAILABLE EXTERNAL RESOURCES WOULD BE OF THE REQUIRED MAGNITUDE AND ON TERMS AND CONDITIONS COMMENSURATE WITH AFRICA'S IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT NEEDS, AFTER THE SO-CALLED LOST DECADE OF THE 1980'S. NEITHER SHOULD WE MOURN OVER THE PAST POOR ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF OUR COUNTRIES OR THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING US SUCH AS DEBT, ADVERSE TERMS OF TRADE OR INADEQUATE EXTERNAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES.

WHILE RECOGNIZING THE EXISTENCE OF THESE PROBLEMS, WE ALL HAVE A DUTY TO SET OUT CONCRETE ACTIONS AND MEASURES TO ENABLE AFRICA HALT AND REVERSE THE TREND OF DECLINE AND FORGE AHEAD WITH ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. WE ALREADY RECOGNIZE THAT WHATEVER ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE EXTERNALLY WILL, FIRST AND FOREMOST, FLOW TO EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. WE SHOULD, THEREFORE, NOT PEG EXCESSIVE HOPES ON ADDITIONAL RESOURCE FLOW FROM ABROAD.

AFRICA SHOULD, NONETHELESS, ATTACH IMPORTANCE TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND TO THE ENHANCED ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM. AT THE END OF LAST YEAR, THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTED THE UNITED NATIONS NEW AGENDA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA IN THE 1990s IN WHICH AFRICA'S RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT, AS WELL AS THOSE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, ARE CLEARLY SPELT OUT. THIS CONFERENCE SHOULD SERVE TO REMIND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF ITS RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT SO THAT THE NEW AGENDA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA DOES NOT SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS ITS PREDECESSOR UNPAAERD.

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,

THE REPORT ON THE SOCIAL SITUATION IN AFRICA HAS, ONCE AGAIN, POINTED OUT THE CONTINUED INCREASE IN POPULATION AND THE PREVALENCE OF DROUGHT, WHICH WILL COMBINE TO INCREASE THE PRESSURE ON THE CONTINENT'S LIMITED RESOURCES AND RESPONSE-CAPABILITY. ALSO STRESSED IN THE REPORT IS THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ARISING FROM

OVER-EXPLOITATION OF TROPICAL FORESTS AND SAVANNAH WOODLANDS. HONOURABLE MINISTERS ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE MAIN ORIENTATION OF THE AFRICAN COMMON POSITION WHICH WAS FORMULATED, LAST NOVEMBER, IN ABIDJAN, FOR THE EARTH SUMMIT IN RIO DE JANEIRO, IN TWO MONTHS TIME. THE EXPECTATION IS THAT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES SHOULD BE SEEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICA'S LACK OF FOOD AND ENERGY SECURITY, THE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND HOUSING AND FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH TRANSFORMATION THAT WOULD GUARANTEE PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT.

ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, CONFLICTS, INSTABILITY AND ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS OF REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS HAVE CONTINUED TO BEDEVIL THE CONTINENT'S EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE LASTING PEACE WHICH IS AN IMPORTANT PRECONDITION FOR THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. EVERY PASSING DAY TENDS TO COMPOUND THE PROBLEM AND, THUS, MAKES MORE URGENT THE NEED FOR LASTING SOLUTION IN ORDER FOR AFRICA TO FORGE AHEAD WITH RENEWED FORTITUDE, WITH ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
EXCELLENCIES,

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGNATURE OF THE ABUJA TREATY WAS AND IS NOT ONLY IN ITS DEMONSTRATION OF THE COMMITMENT OF OUR LEADERS TO ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND COOPERATION BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, ON THE EMPHASIS IT HAS PLACED ON INTRA-AFRICAN INTEGRATION AND COOPERATION. AFRICA'S CRITICS HAVE, OVER THE YEARS, CLAIMED THAT THE EXISTENCE OF TOO MANY COUNTRIES IN AFRICA,

THE MULTITUDE OF NON-CONVERTIBLE NATIONAL CURRENCIES, TRANSPORT PROBLEMS, LOW TRADE VOLUMES WERE FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION OF THE CONTINENT. THE SIGNATURE OF THE TREATY IS THE FIRST BUT MOST IMPORTANT STEP IN PROVING THESE CRITICS WRONG. WE SHALL NOW BUILD ON WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR AND PROCEED WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TREATY. ALREADY, SOME OF OUR COUNTRIES HAVE RATIFIED THE ABUJA TREATY WHILE OTHERS HAVE SET IN MOTION THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER PROCEDURES REQUIRED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE NATIONAL SYSTEMS FOR RATIFICATION OF THE TREATY. I URGE THESE COUNTRIES TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS SO THAT THE ENTERPRISE CAN BE PUT ON STREAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

WE, IN THE OAU SECRETARIAT, ARE HIGHLY CONSCIOUS OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE TASK THAT LIES AHEAD AND OF THE NEED FOR US TO RESTRUCTURE AND READJUST IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN OUR CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT THE EFFORT OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO BRING THE COMMUNITY INTO BEING. TO THIS END, WE, THE EXECUTIVE HEADS OF OAU, ECA AND ADB HAVE SET UP A JOINT SECRETARIAT OF OUR THREE INSTITUTIONS AND HAVE DECIDED TO DISCUSS, IN EACH OF OUR BI-ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS, THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABUJA TREATY. THE JOINT SECRETARIAT WILL ENABLE THESE AFRICA'S FOREMOST INSTITUTIONS TO BRING TO BEAR ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TREATY, THEIR COLLECTIVE EXPERTISE, AS WELL AS THE POOLING OF THEIR RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF THIS EFFORT.

THIS IS, INDEED, A PROJECT IN RESPECT OF WHICH ALL HANDS MUST BE ON DECK; ALL SEGMENTS OF THE AFRICAN SOCIETY MUST BE INVOLVED, GOVERNMENTS, POLITICAL PARTIES, PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS,

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS, WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS, JOURNALISTS, ACADEMICS, TRADE UNIONS, YOUTH, RELIGIOUS GROUPS, AND THE LIKE. IT WILL, THUS, BE INCUMBENT UPON THIS CONFERENCE TO SET UP SUCH MECHANISMS OR PROCEDURES AS WILL ENABLE IT MONITOR CLOSELY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABUJA TREATY WITH A VIEW TO FACILITATING AND ACCELERATING THAT PROCESS. I WOULD, THEREFORE, LIKE TO ECHO THE CALL MADE BY THE OAU SUMMIT, LAST YEAR, THAT THIS SUBJECT SHOULD BECOME A PERMANENT ITEM ON THE AGENDA OF THIS CONFERENCE.

WE ARE NOW IN THE LAST DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY, A CENTURY DURING WHICH ALL OUR COUNTRIES HAVE NOT ONLY ACHIEVED POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE BUT HAVE MADE MUCH PROGRESS IN THE SOCIAL DOMAIN. IN ADDITION, THEY HAVE STARTED TO LAY THE FOUNDATION - EVEN IF STILL SHAKY - FOR AFRICA'S ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION. OUR IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE, DURING THE REMAINING YEARS OF THIS DECADE, MUST BE DICTATED BY THE DETERMINATION TO SOLIDIFY THE FOUNDATION FOR AFRICA'S ECONOMIC SURVIVAL SO THAT THE NEXT CENTURY WOULD SEE OUR CONTINENT TAKE-OFF.

ALL OUR COUNTRIES MUST GIVE TOP PRIORITY TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY MOBILIZING AND COMMITTING THEIR NATIONAL RESOURCES TO THIS END. EXTERNAL RESOURCES, WHICH WILL BE REQUIRED TO COMPLEMENT AFRICA'S OWN EFFORT, HAVE TO BE DIRECTED TO PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS THAT PROMOTE AFRICAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION ON THE BASIS OF THE PRIORITIES ESTABLISHED BY OUR COUNTRIES, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY. ALL AFRICAN ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS MUST GEAR UP THEMSELVES AND UNDERTAKE SUCH INTERNAL RESTRUCTURING AND POLICY READJUSTMENT

AS WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORT.

HONOURABLE MINISTERS,

IN CONCLUSION, I WOULD LIKE TO RE-EMPHASIZE THE CHALLENGE THAT CONFRONTS ALL AFRICAN COUNTRIES INHERENT IN THE SIGNATURE OF THE ABUJA TREATY. THE CHALLENGE IS, FOR AFRICA, TO TURN ITS UTTERANCES INTO CONCRETE ACTIONS THAT CONSTITUTE PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES THAT WILL RID OUR CONTINENT OF MISERY, POVERTY, IGNORANCE AND DISEASE; THAT WILL RESTORE PRIDE AND GIVE HOPE TO OUR PEOPLE AND RE-ENFORCE THEIR BELIEF IN THEMSELVES.

THE MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABUJA TREATY IS THAT IT HAS RESTORED HOPE, FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN OUR COUNTRIES AND PEOPLE; HOPE THROUGH OUR ABILITY TO UNITE FORCES AND POOL OUR RESOURCES FOR THE COMMON GOOD; FAITH AND CONFIDENCE FROM THE EXPRESSED COMMITMENT OF OUR LEADERS IN APPENDING THEIR SIGNATURES TO THE ABUJA TREATY.

MAY THAT SPIRIT OF ABUJA LEAD AND GUIDE AFRICA THROUGHOUT THE REMAINING YEARS OF THIS DECADE AND INTO THE 21ST CENTURY.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.