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STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. SALIM AHMED SALIM

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

OF

THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers and
Other Heads of Delegation,
Distinguished Under Secretary General
of the United Nations and Executive
Secretary of the Economic Commission
for Africa,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the Fifty-seventh time that the second highest organ of our Organization, the Council of Ministers, meeting in an ordinary session, will once again be putting their heads together in a collective effort, to examine some of the problems facing our Continent. This time around however, the Council will be doing so when our Organization is about to commemorate its Thirtieth Anniversary. This gives the Ministers a unique opportunity to reflect and resolve on how best to make the OAU more relevant and effective in addressing the priorities of the day. In the written introduction to my report (Document CM/1737 (LVII) Part I) which has already been circulated to Your Excellencies, I have highlighted some of the challenges and priority areas facing our Organization. I shall therefore refrain from covering the same ground.

Mr. Chairman,

What I propose to do today in my statement is to share with you some of the concerns I have about the direction and performance of our Organization in the last few years in particular. Some of the concerns are generally shared because they are public knowledge; the others are the result of my intimate knowledge about the Organization.

For the few years that I have been closely associated with the OAU, I have observed with considerable trepidation, tendencies of loosening up in terms of our commitment to the Organization and gradually yielding ground to forces of hesitation and despair. Those who have been with the OAU much longer have a much more vivid perception of the situation. Today the concern is not just African Unity but also that of African leadership. In Dakar last year, I drew attention of the Summit to this problem when I stated that the challenge in Africa is now that of leadership. The leaders of Africa need to inject the kind of political will which will nurture and sustain the momentum for change in the Continent. The events of the last few months underscore this preoccupation.

That is not all. I see disturbing signals that Africa is losing the zeal, energy, sense of solidarity, unity of purpose and action. Our will to fight, to stand for what we collectively believe in as a continent, seems to be caving in under the burden of the hard economic times our countries are going through.

There is no other way of measuring our commitment other than what we do. We have, over the years adopted many Resolutions, Declarations, Plans of Action and Strategies. Our intentions have largely remained on paper. In some instances some of us have even gone against commonly agreed positions.

But what is more disheartening is our inability to provide the necessary resources for the operations of the Organization. Take the Liberation Committee for instance. Arrears to the Special Fund is almost 16 million dollars! Outstanding contribution to the General Secretariat is in the

region of US\$ 70 million. We discuss this problem at almost every session. Every Current Chairman makes great efforts in addition to those of the Secretary General and yet the situation continues to deteriorate. At the present rate it is conceivable that payment will completely dry-up in a few years time. And yet, this is the life-blood of the Organization without which the activities of the Organization will grind to a halt.

Mr. Chairman,

At this juncture, let us all ponder and reflect on the nature of problems facing us and frankly determine whether a collective approach has a better chance of success or not and if it does, then why do we hold back, or what is it that holds us back from doing what we ought to do?

Conflicts have for long been a problem with us. We have attempted to deal with them at various points in time. And in Dakar, it received your attention as well as the attention of the Heads of State and Government. From Dakar to Addis, we have witnessed dramatic deterioration in the situation in the continent. The shocking images of walking human skeletons in Somalia do vividly come to mind and may never be completely erased from our memory. Africa watched in apparent helplessness while the carnage went on there. The appeals of the Current Chairman and myself to African states for humanitarian assistance were heeded by only a few of our states. The situations in Liberia and Angola also evoke feelings of sorrow revulsion and anger in every African. Sorrow because of the death and misery and anger because of

the apparent helplessness of Africa. And even the simmering tensions in Togo and Zaire have added to the feelings of despair and fury.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa can be accused of many things but not its ability to produce ideas. The Lagos Plan of Action is a living testimony to that. That document is even prophetic, because it saw the impending doom long before the signs became visible to many others. And what did we make of it? That is always the problem. Ten years after its adoption, we decided to implement some of its basic tenets. But this was after the effects of the global changes had become clear to us. A year after that in Abuja, we signed the Treaty establishing the African Economic Treaty. That was progress. It would seem that was the end of the momentum of the progress. The ratification process has unfortunately taken much longer time than expected. Admittedly, ratification process varies from country to country, but we also do know that matters of importance and urgency are dealt with under a Certificate of Urgency. I do not want to believe that the urgency of the matter is not appreciated by all. And yet it is difficult to assign any other reason for the delay. Everything that has happened since 1990 reinforces our conviction that the only salvation for Africa, in the face of the global changes, is through the economic integration of the continent. Africa will become the periphery of peripheries if we continue to delay continental integration and planning. Individual approach to development is no longer a solution to the problems facing Africa. And delays at implementing commonly agreed positions only serve to drive Africa further down the economic morass.

Mr. Chairman,

I can go on endlessly, and the picture will be the same. Our main problem is our inability to do what we have freely designed for ourselves. Some have ascribed this to lack of political will. Others have sought to justify this great hiatus between declarations of intention and concrete action in terms of economic hardships facing our countries. But whatever the reasons, the end result has been to erode our own credibility. Africa can only be taken seriously by the outside world - both friends and foes, if it takes itself seriously in the first place. Imperfect as it is, the OAU is Africa's best hope for survival and dignity. I have raised this problem so that we earnestly look for its genesis, and attempt to find a solution, always bearing in mind that in the final analysis, the OAU is what its Member States want it to be.

The people of Africa have great hope in the OAU. They see the OAU as the embodiment of their collective innermost aspirations. In my travels throughout Africa people have made this clear to me. It is reflected in the numerous letters that come to my office almost every day, and it is also reflected in the writings of scholars and intellectuals. I am seeing the beginning of a movement made up of people whose impatience is understandable because they know and believe the Organization can do more. They are calling for a change in attitude in response to the changing circumstances.

It is a movement for a better tomorrow. But in order for this movement to take root and bring with it that better and prosperous tomorrow, which we seek, it is necessary to promote an alliance with that Movement; an alliance between the

Governments, the People and the Non-governmental Institutions to defeat the many prejudices against Africa and the self-serving stereotype notions advanced by the detractors of our Continent.

Yes, we need to change our attitudes, attitudes whose origins are steeped in our colonial past, and which still hold us in bondage. We must overcome the dependency syndrome. We must not expect others to do for us what we should do for ourselves.

Our attachment to certain universal principles and concepts has served our continent fairly well. We must continue to adhere to these principles. At the same time, however, we must live up to the rising challenges and requirements of our continent. In Europe, the concept or the exercise of Sovereignty has not stood in the way of the building of the European Community. Likewise, we in Africa should learn from the experience of Europe and rise above the limiting factors of sovereignty and move expeditiously towards the establishment of the African Economic Community.

Mr. Chairman,

If I have struck a note of pessimism, it is because I see danger gnawing at the very roots of the Organization. I believe that we are capable of effecting changes provided we apply ourselves to it just as we are doing with the transition to multi-party democracy. The new orientation required to set us on the path to progress calls for strenuous effort. We have no way but to pursue it if we are to avert a harsh verdict of posterity.

We must fight the image of Africa as a continent impermeable to change, where conflicts are endemic, where there is no regard for the sanctity of human life and whose people wait on others for their up-keep and survival. The world is increasingly losing interest in the poverty and misery of Africa. We should begin to realize that we have no where else to turn but to ourselves.

The fear of marginalization has been haunting all of us. But a far more sinister marginalization seems to be developing. Issues that are exclusively African are in these days being handled by others without reference to Africa. That is, we are being marginalized even on issues concerning us. And yet, these things are taking place because of our inability to make some sacrifice for the honour and prestige of Africa. A little more commitment and a little more sacrifice could and indeed would make a difference. At the very least we should refuse to be mere spectators to tragic events unfolding in our own continent.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are my concerns, concerns that must be responded to. I know you have met principally to examine our draft budget, prepared on traditional lines; a budget of some \$27 million for a whole continental Organization of some fifty one members! We have difficulties with payments. And while the Council has, in the past, addressed itself to this important issue, I hope more attention will be devoted to it this time. For the increasing responsibilities devolving on the OAU cannot be attended to if this situation persists. We cannot

play any role in conflict management and resolution if the Organization is deprived of the necessary resources to function. To say this is not to be insensitive to the tremendous economic difficulties facing Member States. I believe if we could address some of the concerns I have referred to, we may hopefully be addressing the root-cause of this seemingly intractable problem.

On that note, Mr. Chairman, I wish your session fruitful deliberations.