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**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU,
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, AT THE FOURTH EXTRAORDINARY
SESSION OF THE AUTHORITY OF HEADS OF STATE
AND GOVERNMENT OF ECOWAS**

LOME, TOGO.

DECEMBER 17, 1997

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Your Excellency

Mr. Gnassingbe Eyadema, President

of the Republic of Togo,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Distinguished Heads of Delegations,

Distinguished Executive Secretary of ECOWAS,

Distinguished Representative of the Secretary General

of the United Nations,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel greatly honoured to be in your midst today, in this beautiful capital city of the Republic of Togo, where the warmth of the welcome and hospitality of the Government and people, are traditionally African. I wish at the outset, to express my appreciation to His Excellency President Gnassingbe Eyadema, for the kind invitation he extended to me, to attend this extraordinary session of the Summit of ECOWAS. I also wish to

acknowledge and thank President Eyadema for the initiatives he has taken to advance the interest of peace, security, stability and development in the West African Sub-Region and the African Continent as a whole.

This extraordinary session of the Summit of the Conference of the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, is taking place against a backdrop of our collective preoccupation with issues of peace, security, stability and development. In more ways than one, this Summit represents an acknowledgement of the strong linkage that exists between peace, stability and economic development and the effects of conflict that currently ravages some of our societies. Indeed, as far back as 1990, when African leaders adopted the landmark Declaration on the Fundamental Changes taking place in the World, they explicitly acknowledged that Africa's collective efforts towards economic development, would remain constrained, as long as the scourge of conflicts and growing instability in some parts of the continent were not addressed. All over the continent, African leaders are assuming increasing responsibilities in the areas of conflict prevention, management and resolution, through genuine and consistent peace-making, peace-keeping and post-conflict peace-building programs and activities. In Southern Africa, SADC established a political organ for peace and security; in the Horn of Africa, IGAD established a conflict

Resolution Mechanism for the sub-Region. At the continental level, the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, has for over three years now, facilitated the enhancement and efficacy of the collective African efforts in the areas of peace, security and stability.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There can be no peace, security and economic development in an atmosphere of conflict and political instability. Similarly, there also cannot be genuine stability and peace in an environment that is characterized by poverty, economic under-development and destruction of infrastructure. This is where the current ECOWAS extraordinary Summit is both timely and most welcome. ECOWAS was established to promote the economic development and integration of the West African sub-region. The present move to establish a framework for conflict prevention, management and resolution within the sub-region, is by no means a coincidence. It is firmly rooted in the objective realities prevailing in the sub-region. It is a sound initiative informed by the unacceptable trauma that armed conflicts and humanitarian tragedies have inflicted on many innocent people, especially, women and children in the sub-region. My presence in your midst today, is to lend continental

solidarity to the important decision that you are about to take and to say to you that Africa is with you as you seek to establish a sub-regional mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. It is my conviction that such a sub-regional mechanism will enhance the efforts of the continental mechanism and will work very closely with it.

Excellencies,

Your meeting today is not taking place in a vacuum. One of the most enduring images, that was beamed to the world about seven years ago, was the spectre of war and anarchy in Liberia, a development that threatened devastating consequences, not only for that country, but also, for the sub-region as a whole. At the time, the world watched while Liberia slipped into war and conflict. For me personally, as an African and Secretary General of the OAU, the 1990 Banjul Summit was a moment of great pride that till today, still holds fond and cherished memories. It was at that Summit, that the leaders of the West African sub-region, before the eyes of an international community, that was at best uncertain on what to do in Liberia, took the bold and courageous decision of establishing ECOMOG. It is a mark of the leaders' collective vision and courage, your resourcefulness and your strong political will to sacrifice for the greater good of the sub-region, that ECOWAS and

ECOMOG, often acting without the much needed international support, steered the sub-region through the vicissitudes of the conflict in Liberia and ultimately, together with the people of Liberia, finally brought peace to that country. It is my firm conviction, that the successful conduct of the Liberian operation by ECOWAS, has enriched the cumulative experience of the sub-region in peace-making and peace-keeping and in a very special way, served as a source of pride and inspiration to the rest of the continent.

While Liberia under the leadership of its popularly elected President, His Excellency Charles Taylor, gets on with the task of consolidating its hard won peace in a period of post-conflict reconciliation and national reconstruction, our optimism continues to be dampened by other unacceptable developments within the sub-region, especially the usurpation of power by the military junta in Sierra Leone. If there is any one justification for putting in place the Mechanism that is envisaged by the regional leaders here in Lome, Togo, it is situations like that prevailing in Sierra Leone. That unfortunate situation, speaks for the need for continued vigilance and collective security arrangements that will protect our people against those who would rather kill and maim the innocent and the weak, to achieve their selfish political interests. I am gratified that in this respect, you, our leaders have not been found

wanting. I recall with pride, the unity and cohesion that helped Africa to wage a successful liberation struggle against colonialism and apartheid on the continent. The solidarity that West Africa extended to the Southern African States, undoubtedly proved critical in expediting the demise of apartheid in South Africa. Indeed, it was within this context that Nigeria became a member of the Frontline States of Southern Africa.

I have used this example to make the point that there is nothing we cannot achieve when we are united and determined. Indeed, within your sub-region, the work that you have done and the exemplary role of ECOMOG in Liberia, as well as the current efforts of ECOWAS in Sierra Leone, are shining examples of the leadership roles that Africans have assumed in the quest for peace and stability in the continent. This is important as we grapple with the issue of how we can maximize the benefits to be garnered from the various initiatives which our partners in the international community have undertaken in this domain. I have in mind, notably, the African Crisis Response Initiative, jointly sponsored by the Governments of France, the UK and the USA.

I am gratified that in responding to these initiatives, African leaders have given serious consideration to what we as Africans can do and providing leadership in determining the parameters on which our friends

and partners from outside the continent, can extend meaningful assistance to complement our efforts. I was encouraged by the frank discussions that took place during the 7th Ordinary Session of the Central Organ at Ministerial level, which took place from 20 – 21 November 1997 in Addis Ababa and the informal consultations that took place at the United Nations in New York on 5 December 1997. Clearly, there is a strong determination on the part of African countries to strengthen their activities in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution. One important component of such activities, should be a more enhanced focus on post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building, if we are to avoid situations such as those witnessed in Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again, West Africa is assuming its responsibility in dealing with the issues of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution on our continent. I am hopeful that this meeting will constitute yet another significant milestone in our common endeavour and quest to bring about the maintenance of peace, security, stability and economic development,

as well as the integration of West African States and ultimately, our entire continent. In unity, you will find the strength and collective wisdom to realize this African vision and Agenda for the next millennium.

I wish you successful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.