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Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT OF THE OAU SECRETARY GENERAL,
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
TO THE IPA/OAU CONSULTATION ON
"THE OAU AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA"**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

19 - 21 May 1993

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like first of all, on behalf of the OAU and on my own behalf, to welcome you all to Addis Ababa. I am fully aware that you have set aside time to come despite your many other engaging duties. We very much appreciate it. I wish also to express our appreciation to Amb. Olara Otunnu and his staff of the International Peace Academy for the very positive and constructive role the Academy has played in the organization of this Consultation.

Mr. Chairman,

As the world becomes more and more of a global village, the concept of **"shared responsibility"** equally becomes more compelling and relevant in our daily lives. We have assembled here not only to exchange ideas, views and experiences on the question of conflicts in Africa, but also to see how best we can plan together to tackle the scourge of conflicts on our continent more effectively. Indeed, it will not be an exaggeration for me to state that instability in one country today may be instability in another country tomorrow. And in this rapidly changing world, our Organization, the Organization of African Unity, must remain vigilant and action-oriented and must set its priorities right. It is clear that the current waves of change in the Continent cannot be stopped; but we will be judged by our future generations by how we manage the process of change.

We are all aware today that the march to a more democratic Africa is advancing at different speeds. While some countries have managed to go through democratic changes without profound upheavals or violence, others have not been so fortunate; hence the need to guide and, orientate the process of transition in our countries. One thing, though, that needs to be spelled out here is that today there is hardly any country in Africa that can afford to remain indifferent to the current waves of change and sometimes their attendant problems of conflicts and instability.

It is true that increased co-operation between states has resulted in the reduction of inter-state conflicts. But at the same time, situations of conflict and domestic tension along ethnic, religious, regional and even linguistic lines have arisen and multiplied within states to threaten not only social cohesion but also human survival. In other words, the guns of the decolonization process in Africa unfortunately have only been replaced in some cases, by the guns of anger, hatred and disunity.

At the fore of this situation of heightened instability are the forces of change versus those of status quo. The future of Africa, therefore, will very much depend on the degree to which we as Africans can resolve the prevailing conflicts in a co-ordinated and sustained manner.

Mr. Chairman,

The story of conflicts in Africa is a story of death, hunger, starvation, forced migration, destruction of property and wasted resources. Indeed, we will remain in the intensive care unit of the international community if we do not aim at utilizing the limited resources available, both human and material, for meaningful development.

Our people all over the continent are crying out for two things: peace and justice. But peace and justice are indivisible. In order to have peace, we must work for justice not only by ensuring governance through the consent of the governed but also ensuring respect for human rights, popular participation, equitable distribution of resources, as well as the building of a democratic culture that promotes the advancement of mankind on merit and fair play. And in building this democratic culture, we must prepare ourselves to deal with individuals, with structures, and with systems-all through and through. For true democracy cannot be conditional: either you democratize, or you do not, with all the possible repercussions.

We all agree that Africa is a continent in transition; but we should not allow this transition to linger on for ever. We must assiduously and in tandem work towards getting to our destiny as soon as possible. For Africa to achieve socio-economic progress, in order for our continent to avoid being marginalized by the rest of the world, it is imperative that we address the prevailing conflicts with renewed vigor and commitment. With the end of decolonization of the continent,

I believe, the OAU must now redirect its energies and focus on the one issue which stands to undermine whatever else the continent may wish to embark on or to do, including our current plans for the African Economic Community.

Of course one must recognize the earlier efforts deployed by our leaders, geared towards resolving conflicts in Africa. But the mere fact that conflicts have continued to exist and even assume greater intensity suggests that somewhere down the road there must be a missing link.

Mr. Chairman,

There are the perennial criticisms of the OAU - what it could have done and did not do; its lack of an acceptable and viable framework for dealing with conflicts in Africa, the lack of political will on the part of the African countries to apply themselves resolutely to the search for solutions to conflicts and so on. Obviously, some of these criticisms are genuine. There are however many which are false. I therefore see this consultation as providing a unique opportunity, bringing together people of varied experience, from within the continent, to look at how Africa has dealt with conflicts in the Continent until now. It is an opportunity to see how the institutional and political arrangements in the Continent can be revamped and re-aligned more congruently to the tasks of finding durable solutions to the scourge of conflicts. It is an opportunity to look at the institutional set up of the OAU, its political processes as well as its resource base - actual and potential, and see how these can be made to interact more efficiently in the service of peace in the Continent. It is

equally an opportunity to examine how the Continent, through the OAU can be empowered to have the initiative and play the central role in the attempts to find solutions to its conflicts and to use international support and co-operation either bilaterally or through the United Nations more creatively and efficiently.

For ultimately it is only until we are able to assess the full potential of Africa, and the problems we face, especially the political and resource constraints, that we will manage to put in place credible arrangements for effectively dealing with conflicts.

Mr. Chairman,

Thus, concerned with the escalation of Conflicts in Africa and the negative effects that these conflicts were causing on the development process of the continent, the African Heads of State and Government met in July 1990, and held free and frank discussions on how to tackle conflicts in Africa within the framework of the fundamental changes that had already started to take place in the world. At the end of their session, they adopted a Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Changes Taking Place in the World, in which the leaders committed themselves to work towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts in Africa, for purposes of creating an enabling environment for development.

In recognition of the crucial role that the OAU would play in the field of conflict management, the Council of Ministers in 1991 approved for the first time in the history of our Organization an appropriation in the budget to be used for conflict resolution. During the 27th Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Abuja, I informed the Summit of my intention to undertake a restructuring exercise within the Secretariat aimed at making its structures more responsive to its new missions which of course included conflict management. This was followed by the establishment, in March 1992, of a Division of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within the General Secretariat and as approved by the 1992 February Session of Council of Ministers.

I followed this with consultations with Member States on the possibility of setting up a permanent mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and the form which such a mechanism should assume. These consultations, culminated in my report on **Conflicts in Africa and suggesting proposals for an OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and Resolution**, which I submitted to the Fifty-sixth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of June 1992, in Dakar, and which report constitutes one of the background documents for this Consultation.

A total of 38 Member States took the floor in Dakar to debate this report. At the end of the debate, Council referred the matter with its recommendation to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The Summit adopted, in principle, the establishment within the framework of the OAU and in keeping with the objectives and principles of the

Charter a Mechanism for Preventing, Managing and Resolving Conflicts. I was further requested to undertake an in-depth study on all aspects relating to such a mechanism, including institutional and operational details as well as its financing, with a view to reporting to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in its Twenty-ninth Ordinary Session for further action.

Meanwhile, in February this year, I took the liberty to submit to Council of Ministers my interim report on the mechanism based on the views, observations and proposals I had obtained from many Member States, as well as the intensive and extensive consultations I had held with the representatives of Member States, resident in Addis Ababa. The primary purpose of my interim report to the last Council Session was to identify, on the one hand, those issues that clearly command the consensus of Member States and, on the other hand, those requiring further discussion and consultation.

Following the introduction of my interim report last February, no less than 30 Member States took the floor and made interventions. Their interventions, I must admit, have helped us a great deal to concretize our views on the kind of mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution that Member States really want.

Mr. Chairman,

I have endeavored to describe our initiatives in the field of Conflict Management particularly those relating to the establishment of a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, not only because of OAU's current and total commitment to the subject, but also to suggest one of the areas which the discussions of this consultation could cover, in order to help us in the process of our thinking redefining our priorities relating to the proposed mechanism we plan to present to our leaders in Cairo next month.

Mr. Chairman,

I am happy to note that amongst us we have personalities of such varying backgrounds: academics, diplomats, statesmen, researchers and military personnel. In other words, we have in our midst personalities who through the prism of their respective professions and on the basis of their cumulative experiences will, I believe, be in a position to analyse objectively the subject before us, and guide us all through in the search for peace, security and stability. Our consultations should bring us not only to what is desirable, but also to what is feasible. I am aware of the time constraint, but I believe if we apply ourselves in a business-like manner, we will be able to come out with very sound and useful contributions.

While you will be exchanging ideas on all aspects of the subject of Conflicts in Africa and, including our proposed Mechanism for preventing, managing and resolving these conflicts, you may also wish to examine in some depth the issue of possible peace-keeping by the OAU, taking into account the limited financial resources at the disposal of the Organization and its constituent Member States on the one hand, and on the other hand, UN's undertaking and determined effort to encourage regional organizations to play an increasing role in conflict management and resolution, given their greater perception of the causes and consequences of such regional conflicts.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to reiterate that my intention here is more to listen and to learn.

Let me once again welcome you all to Addis Ababa and wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you.