

**Address of H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity
At the Official Inauguration of the International Panel
of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994
Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events.**

Addis Ababa, 25 January 1999

- **Your Excellency Ato Meles Zenawi,
Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;**
- **Your Excellency Sir Kitumile Masire,
Former President of Botswana, and Chairman of the
International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the
1994 Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events;**
- **Distinguished Members of the Panel:
General Amadou Toumani Toure; Former Head of State of Mali**
- **Madame Lisbet Palme; Madame Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf;
Ambassador Stephen Lewis; and Justice Bhagwati;**
- **Your Excellency K.Y. Amoako,
UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the
Economic Commission for Africa;**
- **Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I wish to welcome you all to this formal inauguration of the International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events. I would like, in particular, to extend a special welcome to Members of the Panel. I seize this opportunity to reiterate to them my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for having accepted to serve in this important body and to make their contribution to this unprecedented endeavour in our continent.

When Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia proposed to the Seventh Ministerial Session of the OAU Central Organ, held here in Addis Ababa, in November 1997, to establish this distinguished panel, I personally felt that his proposal was the most profound reflection of the sentiments and feelings of all concerned Africans following

the tragedy in Rwanda. Indeed, it was received and welcomed by the members of the Central Organ and all those who were present, and subsequently within the International Community, as a strong message of Africa being ready to examine itself critically and to assume its responsibilities fully and without complacency. Indeed, the crime committed against innocent Rwandese, and the magnitude of the tragedy were too horrific for Africa to remain silent. It is, therefore, not a surprise that the proposal was overwhelmingly endorsed by the OAU Council of Ministers, and by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

The presence of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who originally submitted the proposal of establishing this Panel, among us on this occasion is therefore significant. I wish to put on record my sincere thanks and appreciation to him for finding the time to be here, despite his other pressing obligations.

The establishment of the Panel has attracted considerable interest and attention within and outside Africa. Indeed, the impact of the genocide that was committed in Rwanda, in 1994, went beyond the borders of that country. The African and international concerns over the genocide in Rwanda and the surrounding events is reflected in the composition of the Panel which includes personalities from within and outside Africa.

Underlying the decision to establish the Panel, was the question as to how such a grave and heinous crime could be perpetrated after the parties in conflict had so meticulously gone through peace negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, which culminated in the signing of the Peace Agreement on 4 August 1993. How did the International Community allow itself to be misled by the apparent commitment of both parties to the peace process, while it is now clear that one of them was busy preparing for a perpetration of massacres and genocide? Furthermore, the question still haunts all of us, as to how Africa and the World community stood helplessly while children, women and men, numbering over half a million, were within a short period of three months, butchered to death by their fellow citizens. Were there no signs that could have alerted the International Community to prevent the execution of such a barbaric plan? If the signals were there, then what prevented the International Community from acting, and acting swiftly?

There is, therefore, an imperative need to find out what went wrong in Rwanda and within the International Community, particularly between April and June 1994, and indeed, during the events which led to the genocide and the subsequent developments in Rwanda and in the Great Lakes Region. This is not only a moral obligation towards those who lost their lives in this tragedy, but it is also an obligation to future generations. Indeed, the knowledge of what went wrong in Rwanda is critical, for, it might hold the clue to what we, either as Africans or as the larger human family, did or did not do to prevent the genocide. It might also, help us in knowing what can be done in the future to avoid similar occurrence.

Clearly therefore the challenge before the Panel is enormous. I am confident that Members of the Panel will bring their talent, experience, and moral authority to bear in discharging this important responsibility. The Panel is neither a court of law nor a criminal tribunal. It is not meant to duplicate previous and on-going efforts made by International Organizations and individual countries to find out about the various aspects of the tragedy in Rwanda.

The main objective of the Panel is to draw lessons from the events related to the tragedy in Rwanda, with a view to preventing such an occurrence in future. Here, I want to stress the fact that our Continent is not completely immune from the occurrence of a similar tragedy. This concern is, therefore, not simply an imagination. One needs only to look around our Continent and to consider the current and other potential conflicts to discern that the potential for future tragedies is real, if appropriate preventive measures are not taken.

Apart from drawing lessons for the future, the outcome of this Panel is expected to contribute towards the promotion of national healing, reconciliation, and cohesion in Rwanda. It is also meant to contribute towards the promotion of a culture of peace, as well as security, stability in the region.

The investigation by the Panel should also be considered as a momentum in our efforts at preventing conflict situations in the continent. Indeed, close to six years since the establishment of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, sustained efforts have been deployed to address the scourge of conflict in the Continent, albeit with mixed success. I believe, it is time to reflect on how to make our Mechanism more responsive and effective in dealing with the various crises in the Continent. The ongoing crisis in the DRC and in the Great Lakes, the degeneration of the situation in Angola due to the irresponsible attitude of UNITA, the recent sad developments in the Republic of Congo and the sad situation in Sierra Leone where we witnessed horrendous atrocities committed against civilians by the rebels, are cases, among many others, which call for the urgent review of the modalities with which we are operating in addressing the conflicts.

Finally, I wish to reiterate the OAU's unflinching support to the Panel, in facilitating its work. I have no doubt in my mind that Members of the Panel, who are highly committed eminent persons, will pursue this task with vigour and determination. The manner with which they took up their responsibility during their first Organizational session held here last October, is a testimony to their dedication to their work, and to the cause of peace, security and stability in Rwanda and in the Great Lakes Region. I wish to seize this opportunity to appeal to our Member States and to the International Community at large, to extend maximum cooperation to the Panel and to provide it with necessary financial support to carry out

effectively its work. I would like to acknowledge, in this respect, the generous assistance extended by the Government of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia which provided premises for the Panel, as well as the financial assistance or pledges of assistance of the Governments of Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The Panel however is still lacking in adequate resources to be able to discharge its critical mission.

I wish to point out that this is a collective endeavour, which needs to be supported by all in words and deeds. Let us all, therefore, commit ourselves to pushing forward this important initiative.

I thank you.