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**Organization of African Unity**

**STATEMENT BY  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM  
AT THE MEETING OF THE CENTRAL ORGAN  
ON THE SITUATION BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA**

**OAU CONFERENCE ROOM B  
ADDIS ABABA**

**18 MAY 2000**

Mr. Chairman,

I have requested the convening of this emergency meeting of the Central Organ in order to consider the continuing grave situation that prevails between Ethiopia and Eritrea consequent to the resumption of hostilities between the two countries since May 12 of this year.

Members of the Central Organ have been, I believe, following very closely this situation. As Members will recall, both the current Chairman and myself have issued statements expressing our concerns at the resumption of war and our appeals for the immediate ending of the current hostilities. The Central Organ will also recall its own decision taken on 14 May in which it, *inter alia*, appealed "to both parties to put an immediate end to the hostilities and to commit themselves to a peaceful resolution based on the Framework Agreement and to resume Proximity Talks under the auspices of the current Chairman to reach an agreement on consolidated Technical Arrangements".

Members are also aware that the UN Security Council, after deliberating on this issue, adopted last night SC Resolution 1298 which, *inter alia*, calls for immediate cessation of all military action and "demands for the earliest possible reconvening, without preconditions, of substantive peace talks, under OAU auspices, on the basis of the Framework Agreement and the Modalities of the work conducted by the OAU as recorded in its Communique issued by its current Chairman of 5 May 2000 (S/2000/394), which would conclude a peaceful definitive settlement of the conflict".

There is no doubt that continued fighting has cost considerable loss of life and destruction. The suffering of both people in this context is a matter of legitimate concern for the two countries, as it must be to Africans everywhere and the international community at large. For our Organization in particular, the resumption of hostilities is a matter of particular distress considering the energy and efforts put at all levels with a view to putting an end to the conflict and securing a negotiated resolution.

The purpose of convening this emergency meeting of the Central Organ is first and foremost to enable Members of the Central Organ to demonstrate their continued concern over this critical situation and to see what contribution this Organ – as an institution given particular responsibility by African Heads of State and Government for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts – can bring for the resolution of this tragic crisis based on some of the fundamental guidelines which have already been adumbrated in the OAU Peace Proposal. I believe that this session of the Central Organ should also provide an opportunity to hear from both representatives of Eritrea and Ethiopia on the latest situation so as to enable us collectively to see what more efforts could be made to put an immediate end to the fighting and to pursue the path of a peaceful solution. It is my considered opinion that at the very least, the Central Organ, after deliberation, should reiterate its grave concern at the continuation of the conflict, renew its call for an immediate end to the war, and urge the two parties to resume negotiations under the auspices of the current Chairman of our Organization. The basis of these negotiations are already there. In the meantime, the Central Organ should appeal to both parties to do their utmost to spare the lives of civilians in this unfortunate conflict and to facilitate access of humanitarian assistance.

At this juncture, I would like to inform the Central Organ that yesterday morning, I received a communication from President Isaias Afewerki of the State of Eritrea, a copy of which I am circulating to you for information. Similarly, last night, the Chargé d'Affaires of the State of Eritrea conveyed to me a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea which I am also circulating to you for information.

Mr. Chairman, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is not only a blow to the people of both countries with severe implications to the region, but also a blow to the entire Continent. It behooves on us, therefore, to do what we can to end it and to bring about a speedy and peaceful solution. We cannot afford to be frustrated by the setbacks we have encountered, nor can we afford to lower our vigilance and commitment in our collective efforts aimed at achieving these objectives.