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**STATEMENT OF H.E. Dr. SALIM AHMED SALIM  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU)  
AT THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON  
"SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT" IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION**

**KINSHASA, MAY 14, 1998**

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Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

Heads or Representatives of Regional and International Organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish from the outset to thank, most sincerely, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo for taking the timely initiative to convene this important meeting of the countries of the Great Lakes Region. I wish also to put on record our appreciation and gratitude for the warm reception and traditional Congolese hospitality accorded to us.

In the last couple of years, this region has gone through great pain, suffering and enormous difficulties. The conflicts in the region have not only taken a toll on the countries but have also had serious repercussions on the neighbouring countries.

The World's view of the Great Lakes Region has inevitably been affected by the human drama that had unfolded including the genocide in Rwanda, the conflict in this

country, the conflict in Burundi, the conflict in the Republic of the Congo as well as the plight of the refugees and displaced persons and the issue of human rights.

Evidently, no one can be more conversant about these developments and, no one can be more concerned than the peoples of the Great Lakes themselves. That is why this important meeting, convened at the initiative of President Laurent-Désiré KABILA, is so timely and opportune. Indeed, it is only fitting that this meeting should be addressing the issues of peace, security, stability and development.

The Organization of African Unity has, throughout these difficult and turbulent times, been actively involved in our common objective in search for solutions to the problems that continue to afflict the region. These are legitimate concerns of not only the OAU but also of the International Community as a whole. Clearly however, any solution to the problems of the region lies first and foremost with the governments and peoples of the region.

It is significant to note that in our discussion of the issues of peace and security, we shall also be dealing with the equally important issue of development in the region. For, the issues of peace and security cannot be divorced from that of development as no meaningful and sustainable development can take place in conditions of insecurity and instability. The countries of the Region therefore need to undertake an exercise in self-

assessment and thus come out with concrete programmes aimed at providing solutions to these problems with the support of the international community.

I wish, in particular, to take account of the very difficult times which our host country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has gone through in the recent past. Many of the institutions in this country have either been utterly destroyed or dislocated. Nor has the socio-economic infrastructure been spared. There is, therefore, an urgent need to address these problems in a concerted, coordinated and sustained manner. To do so however, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will need the understanding, support and assistance of the countries of the region, Africa and the international Community as a whole. It is in this regard that I am gratified to see high level representation in this meeting of the Developmental and Financial institutions such as the UNDP and the African Development Bank.

Mr. Chairman, there is no denying the fact that in the recent past mistakes have been committed as the region moves from conflict to issues of national reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. I believe the international community should see these developments as challenges rather than adopt an attitude of despair. The countries of the region, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular, need our understanding and support in order to emerge from the nightmare of conflict and thus be in a position to promote and develop political and economic institutions which would culminate in

sustainable development, peace and security not only in this country but in the entire Great Lakes Region.

The participation of the OAU Delegation at this Conference is to reinforce the efforts of the countries of the Region in that direction. We remain ready to work closely with all the participants in the accomplishment of the objectives of peace, security, stability and sustainable development in the Great Lakes Region and beyond.

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