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## **NEW YEAR MESSAGE**

**BY**

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**My fellow Africans,**

As we celebrate the end of the year 2000, I wish, on behalf of our continental Organisation and on my own behalf, to convey to you, hearty congratulations and best wishes for good health, peace and prosperity, in the first century of the new millennium.

A few days ago, we witnessed for the first time in many years, celebrations by the major Religions of the world, which coincided during the same week. Those celebrations and the blessing that I believe they ushered in, should augur well for the peace and good health of our people and our continent. In particular, it should pave the way for a spirit of accommodation and reconciliation between the peoples of our continent, notwithstanding our diversities of religion, ethnicity, race, colour, cultures and political identities.

Our continent is a mosaic of cultures, religions, ethnic and racial identities. Rather than allow these differences to divide us, we should ensure that we understand and use them as a source of strength and greater cohesion.

The year 2000 was proclaimed by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government at their Summit held in Algiers in July 1999, as the Year of Peace, Stability and Solidarity in Africa. Though we may have fallen short of achieving that objective, it is more than obvious that the bold and courageous decision of the Algiers Summit, then only a declaration of intent, has with time, metamorphosed into greater and

total commitment by our leaders to continue to take the issue of peace and security seriously, as a necessary prerequisite for development and integration in our continent. The net effect is that today in Africa, there is no single conflict situation in the continent that is not receiving the attention of an African leader or group of leaders, with the support of their regional and continental Organisations.

Today, I am gratified to acknowledge that largely as a result of the sustained efforts of the Organisation of African Unity, and particularly, the determined efforts by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, with the support of our partners and the cooperation of the two parties, the unfortunate and bloody conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea was brought to an end with the signing in Algiers early in December, 2000, of a Peace Agreement between the two countries.

Eventhough there are still outstanding issues to be addressed definitively, the signing of a Peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia shows clearly that where there is a political will and unity of purpose, even the most protracted and complicated conflict that may have traumatised the people of this continent, can be resolved through negotiations and dialogue. This comprehensive Peace Agreement is therefore a great victory for the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea, as it is also a major achievement for the people of Africa. It should serve as a source of inspiration as we seek to overcome the various outstanding conflict situations in our continent.

I wish also to acknowledge the positive evolution in the long-running conflict in Somalia. Thanks to the sustained efforts of

President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, and the resilience as well as the determination of a broad section of the Somali political and intellectual class and civil society, the Arta Conference for Peace and Reconciliation in Somalia was held, resulting in the election of a transitional Parliament and a transitional Government for the Country.

The OAU and the wider international community have since welcomed this positive development which marks the beginning of an end to the chaos, mayhem and destruction in that country. Clearly, the prospects for a new beginning in Somalia will be further enhanced through the attainment of an all-inclusive political settlement in the country. This is the challenge which confronts the Transitional Government and all those political factions and entities in Somalia, which like all of us, want to see the rebirth of a Somali nation whose destruction and fragmentation had pained us all, but whose potentials we are well aware of.

I wish also to pay tribute to the current Chairman of ECOWAS, President Alpha Oumar Konare and his colleagues in the West African Region, for the consistent efforts they have made to bring peace to Sierra Leone and the countries of the Mano River Basin. The OAU will continue to work with ECOWAS to bring to an end, the prevailing unacceptable and unsustainable state of insecurity and conflict in that Region.

There are also positive signs of progress in the efforts to bring about a resolution of the crises in Burundi and the Comoros. The OAU remains fully engaged to spearhead and support the initiatives that have

been put in place to bring an end to the problems in these countries. We are equally committed to support all efforts to end the conflict in Angola – a country that for more than forty years, has known no sustainable peace and witnessed the terrible impact of war on its people.

Evidently, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we all feel a sense of frustration and grave concern over the lack of progress in the efforts to end the conflict in that country. Unfortunately, the fact remains that so many countries continue to be involved in the conflict in the DRC. It is also equally true, that more than in any other conflict on the continent, so many initiatives have been taken to find solutions to the multifaceted problems in the DRC in its internal and external dimensions, yet little progress has been made to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict. I regret the fact that more often than not, the parties to the conflict in the DRC, have honoured their commitment to the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement, only in its breach. This has been most unhelpful and unfair to our brothers and sisters in the DRC, who continue to be the principal victims of the war in their country.

It is my fervent hope that in the new year, there will be movement in the efforts to end that conflict and that all concerned will do their utmost to create propitious conditions for the speedy deployment of the UN Peace Keeping Forces and the commencement of the much delayed inter-Congolese political dialogue. In the new year, we must exert all possible pressures to ensure that the people of the DRC are spared the trauma of war, so that their country can be allowed to live at peace with itself and with its neighbours.

On the socio-economic front, we witnessed in the year 2000, the same kind of determination by our leaders to define the agenda for Africa in the new century. Our continent which for a long time, was left out of the negotiations for new world trade arrangements, is now endeavouring to play its rightful role in the ongoing negotiations, even if it still suffers from serious under capacity. We continue to demand for fairer treatment from our partners on crucial issues such as Africa's external indebtedness.

The health crisis on the continent has received no less attention. From the ground breaking 2000 Abuja Malaria Summit, to the meeting of the Africa Development Forum held in Addis Ababa earlier this month and the forthcoming Abuja Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and related pandemics, scheduled to take place in April 2001, the continent's leaders at various levels, have been unequivocal in their determination to wage an unrelenting war on the scourge of AIDS and other killer diseases. The sensitisation of our Leaders and the involvement of the African family in providing solutions to Africa's health problems, portend well for our continent. However, in spite of these efforts, we remain face to face with the reality of serious health problems that currently confront all our countries.

The problems of hunger and homelessness, instability and the continuing outflow of refugees from African countries in conflict, are painful reminders of the negative effects of conflicts on our continent. So also is concern over the alarming outbreak of new and complex killer diseases like the deadly Ebola virus which affected a part of Uganda this

year. Not to mention the horrible HIV/AIDS pandemic, which continues to decimate the people of our continent, leaving in its wake, grieving families, widows and orphans, and in the process, denying Africa of a valuable work force, as well as giving a rise to perceptions of an uncertain future in all parts of the continent.

My fellow Africans,

I am only too conscious of the complexity of the challenges that confront us and the efforts that have been made to address them. Despite the formidable problems that I have highlighted, I remain confident and optimistic over the prospects for a new beginning for our continent in the new century. I am looking forward to that new beginning in which good governance, respect for human rights and a consolidation of the democratisation process will prevail in Africa. I believe that our continent can and will be a place where the horrendous crimes and evil that were visited on innocent people in places like Rwanda, Somalia and Sierra Leone, will be things of the past.

In this respect, I would like to commend and encourage the smooth transitions that have taken place in some African countries. Clearly, elections have been conducted in a peaceful, dignified and transparent manner in many African countries, though in some cases they have been fraught with difficulties. Whatever the situation, it is a fact that our continental Organisation had consistently tried to help all its member states by working closely with the people and their Institutions. We look forward to a consolidation of the process of democratisation in Africa, through initiatives such as the Conference on

Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa and by insisting on rejecting all unconstitutional changes in Africa, no matter where they occur, and whatever the pretexts.

I wish to end this message by recalling the great vision and ideal that every African should share. The year 2000 was the year that the continent's leaders adopted in Lome, Togo, the Constitutive Act for the African Union, thus giving effect to the momentous decision taken in Sirte, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in 1999.

The proposed establishment of the African Union will undoubtedly move us closer to a realisation of the vision of the Founding Fathers of the OAU, for greater unity and cohesion among Africa peoples. History has shown that whenever we have acted together as Africans, we have made a difference. Therefore, in dealing with current and future challenges, let us resolve to ensure that we shall all work in harmony and cooperatively as one African Family, so that at the end of the day, when all is done, we can bequeath to the present and future generations of Africans, a continent unshackled by the chains of conflict, poverty, disease, homelessness and underdevelopment.

Thank you and God Bless Africa.