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Organization of African Unity

NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL  
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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
OF THE OAU, DR, SALIM AHMED SALIM

Fellow Africans,

All too soon, the year 1994 within a few days will run its full course, yielding place to a New Year, 1995. On occasions such as this, it is customary to place the out-going year in retrospect, draw the necessary lessons from the balance-sheet as a guide for future action.

1994 has been a year of mixed feelings, a year of joy and a year of sorrow, a year of fulfilment and a year of severe drawback. We have the justifiable joy and indeed euphoria in the victory of humanity in South Africa. But we also had the pain, agony and revulsion of the unparalleled human tragedy in Rwanda.

The swearing in of Nelson Mandela on MAY 10, 1994, as the first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa, marked the end of heroic and titanic struggle for freedom and human dignity in South Africa. The victory over Apartheid was also a victory for the African Peoples and indeed a victory for the peoples of the world. The historic event of May 10, 1994, also has its significance outside the borders of South Africa. The acts of destabilization

sponsored by the Apartheid regime against the Frontline States have happily come to an end. The victory in South Africa also crowns the work of the OAU in the field of decolonization, that chapter has finally been closed after more than thirty years of unremitting struggle for the emancipation of the Continent.

Even though as the youngest member of the family of African nations, South Africa offers us useful lessons to reflect upon. We are all witnesses to the violence that threatened the democratic process and the appeals of the OAU and the international community to the people of South Africa to give peace a chance. We are also aware of how in the final analysis, the people of South Africa rose above their differences in the supreme interests of their country and conducted the elections in a manner that should be an inspiration to us all.

A second lesson that we can draw from the South African elections is that there were no losers, the people of South Africa were the winners. The transitional arrangements ensured that all the parties had a stake in the running of the country. So far, the constitutional arrangement has worked

very well contrary to the pre-election predictions. I have every hope that the wisdom which guided the leaders of South Africa to opt for the present arrangement will see them through to the end, thus obviating any tendency to disturb law and order. Clearly, stability in South Africa will inspire confidence in the economy and the growth in the economy would enable the government to respond more effectively to the aspirations of the people. In the meantime, it is both refreshing and inspiring to see the new democratic non-racial South Africa become increasingly, an important factor for peace, security and stability in Southern Africa in particular, and in our continent in general.

**Fellow Africans,**

At the end of last year, Rwanda stood on the verge of a major peaceful transition to democracy. In my message of last year, I spoke optimistically about prospects in Rwanda with the adoption of the Arusha Peace Accord. Sadly, the tragic events that unfolded subsequently completely shattered this optimism.

We are all painfully aware of what happened in the aftermath of the tragic death of the President of Rwanda as he, together with the President of Burundi, returned home from an important Regional Conference in Dar-es-Salaam. Rwanda ignited into an inferno during which hundreds of thousands of people were hacked and butchered in a most gruesome manner ever seen anywhere in Africa. Africa and the world watched from the side-lines as genocide was being perpetrated. For each day that the carnage raged, it was Africa as a whole that suffered, as her helpless children were torn limb from limb. Rwanda will live in peoples minds for a long long time to come. And yet the anger and revulsion that the people of Africa felt could not be channelled to impact on the killing fields of Rwanda. Ironically, only a year ago, Rwanda was a concrete success story for the OAU and for Africa. There are lessons in Rwanda for the OAU, its member states and indeed also for the people of Africa. A new government is in place and thankfully the pogrom has stopped. In the meantime, about two million Rwandese are still in exile as refugees in Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi.

As the new Government makes tremendous efforts to bring the country to normalcy and as efforts continue, as they must, to work towards national reconciliation, I wish to appeal to all African countries and the international community to support these efforts in practical ways. Rwanda needs assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction so as to make the process of genuine national reconciliation a durable and lasting one. Conditions must be created to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. In all this the Government of Rwanda, the neighbouring countries and the international community have important roles to play.

Let me at this juncture, express gratitude to all those Organizations, in particular the Non-Governmental Organizations that responded to the humanitarian needs that the situation in Rwanda gave rise to. Africa is grateful to them. But above all, Africa is deeply indebted to the generosity demonstrated and sacrifices made by the neighbouring countries, especially Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi in providing refuge to the hundreds of thousands of Rwandese.

1994 seems to have been a wasted year for Somalia, wasted not because there were no efforts made, but the efforts produced no significant results. Increasingly, the warring factions seem to be moving further and further apart and skirmishes are becoming frequent. The international community has become fatigued with lack of progress in the political negotiations and that presumably is part of the reason why the UN troops are being pulled out of Somalia. The people of Somalia and Africa would then basically be left to their own devices. We have often stressed the onerous responsibility of the Somali leaders. Regrettably, our appeals and efforts have not come to much. We have not given up and would never give up hope. It is our fervent hope that the Somali leaders, like their brothers in South Africa, would be able to place national interest above all other interests to salvage their conflict-torn and conflict-weary country and that 1995 will see a new and more positive chapter in the tragic history of that country.

In Burundi, the situation is not exactly like one step forward and two steps backwards, but it is something closer to that. We have been able to deploy a modest OAU presence made

up of a military and civilians in Burundi. We keep moving from one problem to the other, and between high and low tensions. I commend the Government, and all the political parties for the relative restraint exercised so far, in not pushing the country over the precipice. But Africa demands a lot more from them in defusing tension and the building of confidence and trust between and among them as leaders. And most urgently we demand an immediate ending to the killings of innocent men and women which continue to plague that country with increasing regularity. I appeal to the people and leaders of Burundi to marginalise the forces of extremism and strengthen the forces of moderation in their country. I appeal to them to give peace and democracy a chance as I also appeal to the international community to intensify its efforts in order to avert another catastrophe in that country.

Recognizing as we do the crucial importance of finding a lasting resolution to the refugee question with respect to both Rwanda and Burundi, the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees are currently preparing for a major Regional Conference on Assistance to

Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes Region. It is expected that the Conference will take place in Bujumbura in February 1995 with the full participation of the countries of the region and Africa and with the full support of the international community.

The situation in Liberia is coming to a head depending on what the leaders of the various factions decide to do subsequent to their latest round of talks in Accra. The renewed efforts of President Rawlings of Ghana in recent months to break the stalemate and to get the Accords back on track deserve our appreciation and full support. These efforts have culminated in a New Accord which was reached in Accra a few days ago. Like in Somalia, we would like to urge our brothers in Liberia to take the on-going negotiations seriously and give the people of Liberia the opportunity to determine who their rulers should be and to end the agonies and misery of the people they claim to be leading. We urge our brothers in Liberia to give maximum support to the efforts of ECOMOG so that 1995 would bring all the sufferings and miseries to an end, a year of peace during which all Liberians would link up hand in hand in a joint and collective effort to

put the pieces together for the progress and prosperity of Liberia. The Agreement reached in Accra is a very encouraging development. But more needs to be done to build upon this significant achievement.

I wish at this juncture to recognize and pay tribute to the role played by officers and men of African Peace-keeping Forces of ECOMOG both those from ECOWAS member states as well as those from Tanzania and Uganda for their continued role in support of the peace process despite tremendous hardships and sacrifices.

1994 is also a year of fulfilment for MOZAMBIQUE. After much difficulties, Mozambique, at last has been able to travel the full distance of the democratic process and a new government has just been installed. We wish to offer our congratulations to FRELIMO and RENAMO and all the other parties for giving peace a chance and for the creation of the necessary atmosphere for the growth of democracy. It is our hope that the people of Mozambique will also link up in a collective effort for the consolidation of peace and national reconciliation and reconstruction. After the justifiable

euphoria for the victories scored in South Africa, the ending of the war there is a source of great joy and pride to all Africans and all our friends beyond the borders of our continent.

Angola is another battle-torn country where hope is on the horizon. The Lusaka Round of Negotiations has at last produced an Agreement as evidenced by the historic signing of the Lusaka Protocol on November 19, 1994. There are many obstacles yet to overcome, but I remain confident and optimistic that 1995 will bring peace to the people of Angola after long destructive years of civil war. We urge the parties to the agreement to strictly respect its provisions, especially those relating to the cease-fire. And we urge the international community to assist both Angola and Mozambique in the gigantic tasks of rehabilitation and national reconstruction

Another destructive war that still continues to rage is in Southern Sudan. 1994 witnessed an important peace initiative by the IGADD countries. The OAU fully

supports this initiative. Though admittedly, a break-through has not yet been achieved, the IGADD initiative remains the most important and serious African attempt to resolve the tragic conflict which continues to cause death, destruction and suffering. It is my fervent hope that the peace efforts will be intensified within the New Year. The OAU will spare no effort towards this objective.

There are other flash-points of tension and human suffering in our continent resulting from misunderstanding, intolerance and extremism. It is our sincere hope that the New Year will usher in a period of greater understanding, solidarity and tolerance among our peoples and our societies and greater concern and respect for human rights.

**Fellow Africans,**

I have up to now been discussing conflict situations in Africa, which unfortunately have come to occupy centre stage on the agenda of the OAU. I had the occasion last year, to discuss the Mechanism that our Heads of State and Government have created within the OAU for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The Mechanism is Africa's response

to the plethora of conflicts that plaque the Continent. A key component of the Mechanism is the Peace Fund from which the activities of the Central Organ of the Mechanism will be funded. Apart from assessed contributions, member states are required to make generous voluntary contributions to the Fund. The people of Africa who are clearly concerned about the scourge of conflicts in our continent have been given the opportunity to make contribution to the search for solution to the conflicts. Additionally, the Fund also welcomes contributions from the international community.

So far, the response from the international community has been encouraging, even though the preponderant majority of the members of the international community are yet to demonstrate their solidarity and even though we are grateful to those who have made contributions, we believe there is still enough room for more generous contributions.

The response from Africa has not been up to expectations. I sincerely believe a lot more can be done despite the understandably very difficult economic situation facing our continent and peoples.

Also on the agenda of the OAU, is the democratization process. General Elections were held in a number of countries and the OAU participated in observing most of these Elections. Despite short-comings here and there it is my conviction that the process of democratization in our continent is irreversible. This process which ensures the participation of our people in governance and thereby harnessing their energies towards economic development is an essential component for lasting peace, security and stability in our continent.

**Fellow Africans,**

Let me now turn to the all important issue of bread and butter, to the living standard and welfare of our people. From year to year and for almost a decade and a half the condition of the African has grown progressively worse. We are still unable to produce enough to feed our people; health and educational facilities are increasingly becoming inaccessible to the majority of our people. We do not have to compare ourselves with others to know how worse things are getting, we simply have to look at ourselves, where we were yesterday and the day before yesterday. We have for example only to look at the poor state of our roads, hospitals and school blocks.

These are the reasons that have driven our states to embrace structural reforms. Admittedly, the reforms have brought some discipline into the economy of our states and some measure of growth have been registered in some sectors of the economy. Today, statistics are being produced to indicate that Africa has registered a modest growth. But it is important to relate that growth rate to the actual situation on the ground, i.e the welfare of the ordinary man and woman. By all accounts it is generally accepted that the hardships for the ordinary African have increased and that he/she continues to slide into more poverty. This then raises the challenge on how to ensure that reforms, which are necessary, would seriously address the medium and long-term development objectives of the continent.

The people of Africa recognize the importance of reforms and are prepared to make the necessary sacrifice. But these sacrifices should contribute to the improvement of their future and the future of their children.

**Fellow Africans,**

These are many legitimate demands we can make as we pursue our goals for economic and social development. They

range from better prices for our commodities, greater understanding and support for our debt situation, the urgent need for resources flow both public and private to mention some. But all these demands must not be substitute for our action; they must complement our efforts. The ultimate responsibility rests with us. In 1990, after surveying the world-wide developments, we adopted the Abuja Treaty for the establishment of the African Economic Community. That was Africa's strategic response, the only response that would assure Africa a place in a highly competitive world. The rationalisation was that none of our states, however big it may be, could survive the growing competition. Our survival has always lay in our unity, organic unity through the integration of our economies. But our states continue to behave as if the threat is not real enough ! We are moving too slowly. We can take whatever time we like, but we can be sure no one would wait for us, not even our friends in South East Asia, Central Asia and Latin America. Unless our states move with deliberate speed, Africa would be left outside the global market place.

**Fellow Africans,**

The problems facing Africa are numerous but I have placed before you only those I consider priority of priorities. The world is tired with our unending conflicts and deepening poverty. Let those in conflict resolve to bring peace to their war-torn countries and do honour and glory to Africa in the coming year. Let us all resolve to make a collective frontal attack on poverty in the coming year against marginalization and against being left behind. I sincerely hope that we shall include some of these reflections in our New Year Resolutions.

I wish you all a **Happy and Prosperous New Year.**

**Addis Ababa,**

**December 23, 1994**