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Organization of African Unity

**NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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My Fellow Africans,

Once again, we have come to the end of another eventful year. As we say goodbye to 1997, we need to review events of this past year and make a determination of where we want to go as African peoples and as a Continent. This is also the right time to salute and pay tribute to the courage and the perseverance of Africans wherever they find themselves and to remember all the friends of Africa who have been with us through our moments of triumph and in times of difficulties.

1997 was the year that Liberia emerged from seven years of conflict and instability, thanks to the efforts of the Liberian people themselves, the sacrifices of ECOWAS countries and the gallantry of the men of ECOMOG, as well as the support of the International Community. It was the year that the democratization process was consolidated in different parts of our Continent with greater attention being paid to issues of good governance and respect for human rights by governments right across the Continent.

But 1997 was also the year in which renegade soldiers deprived the peace loving people of Sierra Leone of their hard won democratic choice, thus proving in a very dramatic manner, the real dangers that our people are exposed to in their efforts to realize their long cherished and sovereign aspiration of determining who their leaders should be and how they should be governed.

The fragility of some of the democratic transitions on the Continent was also vividly illustrated during this last year by the unfortunate developments in the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, where separatists from the Islands of Anjouan and Moheli, decided to take their people down the path of an uncertain future. Once again, the threat of instability became real, not only in the Archipelago, but also the entire sub-region of the Continent. Since the eruption of the crisis, the OAU has been deploying sustained efforts aimed at finding a peaceful and negotiated solution based on the respect of the principle of unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros and the need to address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the peoples of the Islands particularly Anjouan and Moheli.

I wish to use this occasion to strongly appeal to all those in leadership positions, especially, in those societies where innocent young men, women and the elderly, have been traumatized by the scourge of war and conflict to take advantage of the blessings that come with the new year, to

observe a truce, cease all hostilities and allow the efforts towards peace and reconciliation to yield the required dividends. We must give our children the time and space that they require to study, and to play and grow up as children. But most importantly, we must allow our peoples to engage in productive activities that alone, will guarantee our future as a people and a Continent.

As we pause to take stock of the state of our Continent today, let us spare a thought for the many young and innocent children who could not make it with us because of conflicts in their societies. Let us also remember the many women, the weak and the elderly, who paid the supreme sacrifice because there are those amongst us who seek to make their points with the weapons of death and destruction, rather than convince us with the force of their arguments.

Let us as Africans continue to show the traditional African compassion for the less fortunate ones in our midst. Let us as people of the same Continent, share the pains of those amongst us who continue to be traumatized by war and conflicts, the child soldiers deprived by warlords of the right to grow up as children and the right to education, children, who if not rescued, may become a lost generation. Let us also sympathize and show compassion with the men and women who are forced to raise their children in refugee camps and the farmers who can no longer work the land for fear of

men in arms and the crippling effect of land mines. As we embark on the rites of passage into the New Year, let us resolve with renewed determination and vigor to forge ahead towards a better future in peace for all our peoples from Angola to Somalia and Western Sahara, from Burundi to Sudan, from the Comoros to the Democratic Republic of Congo and to the Republic of Congo.

This is also an occasion for me to address an appeal to my fellow Africans. My message to them is that the struggle for peace, security and stability of our Continent is the responsibility of each and every one of us whatever his or her position is and wherever he or she is. The business of making peace is not the responsibility of Governments alone. The time has come for Africans to identify themselves more vigorously with the ongoing peace efforts right across the Continent. In this regard, I would like to make a special appeal to our businessmen and women to support peace efforts in our Continent and to make substantial contribution to the OAU Peace Fund which provides a capacity for the OAU to constructively engage in addressing the scourge of conflicts and building peace in the Continent.

One of the ways of building peace in our Continent is through the acceleration of Africa's economic recovery and development and full integration into the global economy. As the global village shrinks, Africa must no longer be left behind in the global attempt to promote trade and

investment, which will bring about sustainable economic growth and development and alleviate the endemic poverty, that sometimes has been responsible for the cyclical violence that has become prevalent in some parts of Africa. It is within this context, that I welcome all the initiatives that are aimed at accelerating growth and development in Africa. It is my hope and expectation that the overarching goal of these Initiatives, will be to bring about a complementarity and synergy between external initiatives and the over-riding objectives of the African Economic Community. In this regard, the inaugural Summit of the African Economic community which was held in Harare last June on the occasion of the OAU Summit signaled the determination by Africa to take its destiny in its own hands and assume greater responsibility for the economic development of the Continent.

In implementing the Abuja Treaty establishing our Continental Economic Community, let us focus more deeply on the goal of creating a community of people, where the average man and woman will feel free and comfortable to pursue his or her legitimate aspirations across national boundaries; where Africans from the East to the West, from the South to the North will work for the integration of their respective economies and where our businessmen and women will pull together to boost trade and economic cooperation.

In the new Africa that we seek to build, we are saying to our partners that the time is opportune to promote investments in all the regions of Africa. We also desire the opening up of markets in the rest of the world for African exports as a means of encouraging the growing community of African entrepreneurs. Above all, it is important for the friends of Africa and our business partners, to show understanding for and encourage the growth-oriented reforms that are being undertaken by African countries, in spite of tremendous difficulties and socio-economic risks to peace, security and stability. For us in Africa, a deliberate and all-inclusive process of economic renewal, regeneration and development, may offer better prospects and returns in this our second liberation struggle for freedom from want, hunger, poverty, homelessness and disease.

I cannot conclude without touching on the humanitarian problems lurking all over our Continent. While it is true that international humanitarian interventions have provided the much-needed life saving assistance to many in Africa, recent developments on the Continent, have seen the recognized rights of refugees and displaced persons come into open conflict with what is deemed expedient. Both human rights and the right to asylum, as well as the principle of non-refoulement, have come under siege. The most recent and unfortunate situation at the Mudende refugee camp in Rwanda, where over two hundred refugees already suffering from the pains of being relocated from their homes and community, were brutally massacred by the apostles of hate

and genocide, is still very fresh in our minds and should be condemned by all those who are genuinely interested in peace, security and national reconciliation in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region.

Beyond these issues however, we need to address the increasingly evident loss of confidence and derogation of the partnership that needs to inform the relationship between humanitarian Agencies and Governments in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and other forms of intervention. This confidence deficit must be addressed in a pragmatic manner, in order to deepen the dialogue and move the Continent towards sustainable peace, security and development.

Finally, within the framework of the preventive mandate of our Mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, I wish to emphasize that in our continent's march towards democratization, all efforts need to be done to ensure that the sanctity of life and human rights are respected. We should accept differences and accommodate different views in a spirit of tolerance. Suspects and offenders should be treated according to the law and the law alone should be the basis for their trial. As we move to 1998, we should commit ourselves strongly to the respect of the rule of law as a guarantee- for cohesion and harmony in our societies.

I wish you all a very happy and prosperous 1998.