

STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE OAU AT THE 19TH MEETING OF THE ECA CONFERENCE
OF MINISTERS - ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 3 - 6 May 1993

- Mr. Chairman,
- Your Excellency Mr. Tamrat Layne, Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia,
- Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
- Your Excellency Mr. Layashi Yaker, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECA,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to take this opportunity to join the preceding speakers in welcoming the honourable ministers, heads of delegations and all the participants, to this 19th Session of the ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Development and Planning in Africa which also coincides with the 35th Anniversary of the Commission.

The importance of the issues to be addressed at this Session has been very eloquently presented by H.E. Mr. Tamrat Layne, in his address. I am sure that his address will be a major contribution to the deliberations at this Conference, and will also provide direction towards fruitful discussions throughout this Session.

In the same vein, I should like to pay tribute to my brother and colleague, Layashi Yaker, the ECA Executive Secretary, for the renewed dynamism and able leadership he has brought to the Commission since his assumption of office. I

would also like to thank him for the excellent and exhaustive analysis of the socio-economic situation in Africa during the past year, as well as for his forecast for the current year and the future.

Mr. Chairman,

The 19th Session of the conference is taking place at a time when Africa is on the verge of a double transition; transition to a new economic era and transition to a new political era. Both the 19th Session of the Conference and the 35th anniversary of the Commission should therefore provide us with yet another opportunity to make an in-depth reflection on the issues confronting our Continent and come up with pragmatic and sustainable solutions to our problems.

Indeed over the last three decades Africa has deployed commendable efforts in addressing issues which have hampered its economic development and recovery. Central to these issues was the eradication of poverty and the improvement of the living conditions of our people. In this regard various strategies and programmes have been initiated either by Africa alone or with the co-operation of the international community in areas such as trade, transport and communications, human resource developments, food and nutrition, health, women in development and environment. Unfortunately, the efforts deployed by Africa in these areas have not yielded the intended results.

Mr. Chairman,

Once again, adequate preparations have been made to enable our Ministers of Economic Planning to appreciate the magnitude of the economic situation facing the continent. The 1993 Economic Report before you and the assessment of other experts on the economic situation in Africa provide exhaustive details to the extent that I do not deem it necessary to duplicate efforts. I shall however highlight a few areas of critical concern.

Since 1980, we have moved from one crisis to the other, and in spite of our efforts and sacrifices, the situation has continued to deteriorate. Most of our countries today are implementing the Structural Adjustment Prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, against the dire social and political consequences of the adjustment programmes. And yet it is being said elsewhere, in the face of the persistent economic crisis, that not enough is being done in terms of the implementation of the adjustment programme. We do not know how far we have to travel, but it must be pointed out that it would be unwise to push us any further beyond what is humanly bearable. Already the unemployment figures in our countries are reaching alarming proportions. Our sick and the needy cannot go to the hospitals because of high cost. Formal education and training is becoming inaccessible to most of our people because of high cost. Any policy that puts the manpower needs of our countries in jeopardy, deserves to be carefully looked at.

We continue to wallow in economic morass because of among other factors, the persistent collapse of commodity prices, the debt burden, inadequate resource flows and the adverse terms of trade. These are matters completely outside the control of African States, but which are of serious consequences to the economic life of our countries. This is why it is important that our development partners and especially the international financial and monetary institutions, bear this in mind when determining the modalities of co-operation with us or of our countries' access to resources and expertise. It is obviously a two-way traffic; action on one without a corresponding action on the other, will not achieve the required results. Is this then not the reason why we have proceeded from one crisis to the other? Is there anything that we can do about the commodity prices, the debt problem and the scarce resource flows? Many ideas have been professed on these issues. We need to probe and examine them further for common action. It is a battle we have to fight and win for ourselves.

We in Africa do recognize that the primary responsibility of the development of the Continent lies with Africans themselves. We also do recognize at the same time the need for shared responsibility and commitment by all the members of the international community and more particularly those of the developed world towards the development of our region.

It is against this background that I welcome the theme of the conference as appropriate and opportune. Indeed the theme "Taking Africa into the 21st Century; implementation of the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community; and

Agenda 21." is of great significance to the OAU. In this regard I wish to share with you some of my reflections on how Africa should prepare its entry into the Twenty-first Century.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa's journey to the Twenty-first Century at least in terms of ideas goes a long way back even to the formative years of the Pan-African Movement. These ideas were kept alive by the pronouncement of some of our leaders soon after independence. Indeed the formation of the OAU itself can be said to be the first major step to the Twenty-first Century. The records of the ECA are also full of this idea especially during the early days of Association with the European Community. It was not until 1980 when ideas crystallized in the form of the Lagos Plan of Action that Africa was formally set on the road to the Twenty-first Century. And yet our preparations have been very slow. Following the fundamental changes that shook parts of the world towards the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, our Heads of State and Government, meeting in 1990, committed themselves once more to continental integration through the establishment of the African Economic Community.

We all recall the historic signing of the Treaty in Abuja in 1991. For almost two years, after the signing of the Treaty we are still waiting for the Treaty come into force. It would seem that the threat to Africa becoming the periphery of the peripheries is not sufficiently being appreciated by some of our Member States. The longer we postpone integration, the more marginal Africa would become in the

world. It is my hope that this initial obstacle will be removed in the next few months to enable the Treaty come into force.

In the meantime, in co-operation with the ECA, ADB and the regional economic groupings, we have been busy with the preparation of the priority Protocols for the Community. I wish in this connection to express my appreciation and gratitude for the support and co-operation we have received from the ECA, ADB and the Regional Economic Groupings in our common endeavour to pull Africa out of the economic doldrums.

I hardly need to emphasize the importance of close co-operation between all those involved in the integration of the Continent. We may recall that the Treaty recognizes the sub-regional groupings as the pillars of the envisaged community. We in the OAU look forward to even more closer co-operation with sub-regional groupings in order to achieve the objectives and aspirations of the Treaty. There is also the imperative need for co-operation with institutions that have socio-economic development of the region in their respective mandates.

In this context, as the lead Organization with primary responsibility for the Continent, we, in the OAU are prepared to make full use of the expertise of these institutions, and more particularly ECA. It is important to exchange views on areas of priority, assist in policy formulation, eliminate duplication and to bring our expertise to the benefit of our countries. Such areas of co-operation would, of necessity include food security and agricultural development; transport

and communication, human resource development, science and technology for development; health and nutrition and trade and finance. We on our part shall spare no effort to ensure maximum co-operation at all levels.

Mr. Chairman,

Whilst we try to put our economies in order and are actively pursuing the path of integration, our efforts can bear fruits only in an atmosphere of peace and stability. We are witnesses to the raging conflicts in parts of the continent for the last two years. Obviously attention and resources have been diverted from more important development issues to the threats of war. Accordingly, the OAU has had to pay a great deal of attention to the conflicts threatening to consume the continent. We have been actively involved in the conflict in Rwanda where the negotiations have now reached the last but the most delicate stage. Africa would have to demonstrate in concrete terms in the next few weeks that it is prepared to make some sacrifice in coming to grips with conflicts. We have also supported the regional effort to bring peace to Liberia. In a similar vein, we have fully played our role in securing international action on Somalia. In all other areas we have not spared diplomatic action, and we shall continue to play our role with our meagre resources. But conflicts have dramatically exposed the weaknesses within the OAU. It is for this reason that we have proposed the creation of a mechanism for conflict prevention, resolution and management. Until we redouble our efforts at conflict management and resolution, our march towards economic integration and development will be greatly hampered. It is

our expectation that during the forthcoming Summit in Cairo, our leaders will recommit themselves to the search for peaceful solution to the conflicts in Africa. In this context, it is also our expectation that the Summit will adopt the proposed mechanism for conflict prevention, resolution and management and this provide our continental Organization with a new instrument for peace.

Mr. Chairman,

The transition to a new political era now in process in the Continent is an important phase in the political liberation of Africa. It is taking place at a time when the Continent is also gripped by the fervour of economic change. What we are witnessing is a powerful duality of transition to multiparty democracy and economic transformation, taking place simultaneously. This will obviously change the entire political and economic landscape of the Continent. I therefore see the challenge of our countries being that of ensuring that these processes of transition are managed well.

It is our strong belief that the issues of governance are as important to economic development as peace and stability are. For that reason we have been promoting peace and national reconciliation. To this end, the OAU has been actively participating in the elections as observers. Events in Angola and elsewhere show the dangers inherent in the transition process that have to be borne in mind at all times. There is every cause for optimism that the transition will be a success, but as usual we have to work hard for it.

The events and developments in South Africa deserve special mention because this is a country with immense potential and capacity to contribute to African co-operation and integration. It is our fervent hope that 1993 will be a decisive year in the struggle for the dismantling of the structures of Apartheid and eliminating the remaining vestiges of racism in South Africa. In view of the recent developments in that country and in particular the dastardly and cowardly assassination of CHRIS HANI, it is of crucial importance that the process of change be expedited. More than ever before time has come to proceed to the formation of the transitional mechanism that would steer the country towards a non-racial democratic South Africa including the holding of general elections. Indeed only such a resolute demonstration of determination to move towards irreversible change can further polarization with its attendant repercussions be averted in South Africa.

**Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,**

It has been said time and again that salvation of Africa depends on the Africans themselves. And as Ministers for Economic Planning you have a leading responsibility. The continental integration that holds the only prospect for our salvation must be vigorously pursued. The establishment of the African Economic Community through which the integration will be brought about deserves our close attention. The delay in ratification of the Treaty does not show seriousness. We cannot and should not approach the Community with the same

attitude that we have exhibited towards other organizations. I urge Your Excellencies to put the Community on a Certificate of urgency and give it your closer attention.

**Mr. Chairman, Mr. Prime Minister, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This conference is taking place on the threshold of a new Century. It is evidently at a time when the Continent is undergoing far reaching changes in the economic and social domains. This process of change, and the necessary adjustments which are attendant to it, is bound to culminate into the total transformation of the political and economic landscape of the Continent. But for this process to be meaningful to our people, it must be managed - and managed well. This is not going to be easy. We are bound to suffer the strain of the magnitude of the task of managing that process.

The process of economic reforms and that of equally arduous political adjustments will test the will and resolve of our governments and people. Yet there is no other viable option. It is an imperative which must be met and which our countries recognize and are determined to meet. The OAU and the ECA have the challenge of seizing the initiative and being in the vanguard of the Continent's effort.

This is an anniversary year for both the Organization of African Unity and the Economic Commission for Africa. We may have different mandates but ultimately we are bound together in the task of holding Africa from sliding deeper into

economic and political difficulties. Uplifting the living conditions of our people and restoring to our countries peace and stability. This shared task, must therefore bring us into greater partnership, and more diversified co-operation. For it is through such partnership that we can avoid duplication of efforts and be able to use the limited resources at our disposal more rationally and efficiently.

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ministers,**

The OAU and the ECA must be enjoined into an engagement for change in the Continent. There is therefore need to reflect over the past and see what our two institutions were able to do, and what now needs to be done to meet the challenge at hand. I believe a lot more could and can be done only if we expend more energy, apply ourselves more creatively and maximize the potential which exists in our two institutions. Our countries are confronted with the double challenge of economic reforms and political transition. I see the role of the OAU and of the ECA, being that of support - of mobilizing for the Continent all the available resources, to enable Africa face the challenges before it with confidence.

For ultimately, if the OAU and the ECA are able to fulfill that supportive function in the management of transition - both political and economic, will we have begun the daunting task of steering our Continent into the next century.

I thank you for your kind attention.