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**STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY
GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY, ON
THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA,
HELD IN ABIDJAN, CÔTE D'IVOIRE
22 NOVEMBER 1999**

Your Excellency, Mr. Henry Konan Bedie, The President of the
Republic of Côte D'Ivoire ; Hon. Prime Minister
 Honourable Ministers ; Mr. Eyadéma, President of Mats.
 Excellencies ; Mr. Drame, Mr. Fomutshe, Ministers
 Ladies and Gentlemen ; members of UN Sec Gen.
 distinguished Participants of various institutions

It is a pleasure for me to participate in the formal opening of this international conference on Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa. I wish to thank the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and the various organising institutions for taking the initiative of convening this important conference and for providing the propitious conditions for its success. I also wish to thank the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for its role in support of this conference.

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Mr. President
Ladies and Gentlemen

This conference is taking place at a very unique conjuncture in the development of our Continent. There are significant dynamics that have evolved during the last decade, arising from within the continent as well as at the global level, whose impact has brought to a higher prominence the issue of governance and its linkage with sustainable development. The fundamental changes in world economic relations, particularly their implications to Africa in the spheres of trade, investments, debt, production efficiencies and competitiveness, have put into the centre-spot the importance of political and institutional framework within which system of economic management operate. Indeed, the phenomena of globalization, and the potentials and threats it engenders to Africa pose critical challenges to our systems of governance. Our local and continental responses to this phenomenon will be dictated by the manner the specific systems of governance are organized.

This conference is also taking place at a time when the civil society in our respective nations has become more vibrant. The African peoples have become more conscious of their rights and responsibilities. There is a higher level of social organization and involvement among the different

constituencies of society, and the overall relationship between the state and society is undergoing profound transformation. Whereas for a long period of Africa's post-independence history, the state was the main actor in development, of late the vital importance of partnership between the public, private and civic sectors of society is being increasingly acknowledged.

I should also add that you are convening here at a time when African governments have pronounced themselves more succinctly on the continental agenda for meeting the challenges of the new millennium. As recently as two months ago, at an Extra-Ordinary Summit of the OAU in Sirte, African Heads of State and Government reinvigorated the vision of unity by deciding to establish an African Union by the year 2001. In essence this decision underlines the commitment towards closer cooperation and integration in surmounting the challenges of development and promoting peace, security and stability.

All these dynamics taking place in the Continent, underline the importance of reflecting critically on the imperatives of governance at this specific conjuncture of our history and as we prepare to enter a new millennium. They also set a challenge for this conference in terms of how

we can surmount some of the obstacles and also add more impetus to the various endeavours aimed at promoting good governance.

A dimension that you cannot afford to overlook in your deliberations, is the fact that Africa has some experience in pursuing reforms for good governance. Apart from the earlier initiatives directed at transforming the inherited colonial apparatus, in almost all African countries, a number of steps have been taken during the last 10 years aimed at streamlining political practices and realigning public and private institutions within the framework of promoting good governance. Impressive achievements have been gained, and some problems have been encountered. An objective review of the experience of this period would therefore make a major contribution in designing strategies for the way forward.

As at this point, and deriving from the experience of the past decade, there is an overwhelming consensus in the continent that good governance is indispensable for sustainable development. Peace, security and stability; development, cooperation and integration; as well as equality, dignity, and prosperity will all remain elusive for as long as good governance is lacking. Conversely, good governance ensures genuine popular participation in the political, economic and social development of our societies. When our

people are freed from the shackles of tyranny, authoritarianism and oppression, they are able to harness their energies and potentials for the betterment of their lives and the general good of our societies.

At the same time, there is also a realization that good governance is not a one-time, single sector project. It is a gradual process, which encompasses political, economic as well as social realms. It is on this basis that, at both the national and continental levels, there has been an ardent commitment and desire to broaden the political space, protect human rights, enshrine the rule of law, promote and consolidate a culture of tolerance, and foster efficiency and effectiveness in economic management.

During the past decade, almost all African countries have been ~~feryently~~ engaged in improving their democratic institutions and practices, reforming their civil services and parastatal bodies, as well as realigning their regulative instruments. Indeed, a strong resurgence of the civil society and the evolving dynamism of the private sector are trends that are increasingly becoming visible in the continent. Both of them are a consequence of the emerging institutional dispensation.

Similarly, at the continental level, apart from the collective commitment of our leaders to undertake measures aimed at promoting the fundamental values of good governance, concrete initiatives have also been taken in pursuing this objective. In this respect, the Abuja Treaty of 1991, establishing the African Economic Community, creates an institutional framework for developing propitious conditions that can collectively enhance the continent's capacity for socio-economic development. The landmark decision made in Sirte, in September this year, to create an African Union by 2001 and to accelerate the establishment of some of the key institutions of the Abuja Treaty, also underscore this aspiration.

The mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution is another initiative aimed at obviating a major impediment to the prevalence of good governance. Similarly, the Charter on Peoples and Human Rights and the Commission associated with this charter provide continental facilities for promoting the respect for human rights and the advancement of the rule of law. In the same manner, the practice that has developed in the last few years of inviting other Member States of the OAU to take part in monitoring and observing elections inculcates a democratic culture and builds confidence among the polity.

The decision taken at the recently held 35th Session of Heads of State and Government in Algiers that Member States whose Governments came to power through unconstitutional means after the Harare Summit, should restore constitutional legality before the next summit in the year 2000, is a further reaffirmation of the continental seriousness on promoting good governance.

All these measures are quite laudable, and they have begun to show positive results in unleashing the energies of our people and promoting the growth and development of our societies. Yet, the persistent presence of violent conflicts in some of our societies is, on the one hand, a manifestation of an inadequate establishment of structures of good governance and, on the other hand, it acts as an impediment to the prevalence of appropriate conditions for promoting good governance. It is therefore necessary that we consolidate our efforts in redressing the scourge of conflict in Africa so that we can be able to put in place the structures of good governance, which is the only effective way of ensuring sustainable peace and stability in our Continent.

Above all, we must vigorously pursue the noble goal of conflict prevention. To do this effectively requires that we deal decisively with symptoms and manifestations of any emerging or potential conflict. For example, as our countries forge ahead towards pluralistic societies, the rules of the game of multiparty politics must be strictly adhered to. A ruling party of today can be the opposition of tomorrow, and vice versa. A climate of tolerance and confidence needs to be consolidated and where it does not exist, it has to be inculcated. Governments must recognize and encourage the positive and constructive role of the opposition. Similarly, the conduct of the opposition Parties must take into account the larger interests of the country and be supportive of the governments, where that support is merited. Put differently, it should be, what is referred to elsewhere, as the **Loyal Opposition.**

Elections must be free and fair and should be generally perceived as such. This approach and behaviour can significantly contribute to the reduction of tension and considerably minimize the possibility of conflict in many transitional societies.

Mention must also be made of the fact that the various efforts deployed in introducing economic reforms in African countries have not produced impressive results in attracting foreign investment and in increasing the continent's contribution to international trade. Africa's share in receiving foreign investment and international trade has not improved significantly, even during the most dynamic decade of the 1990s. Apart from the rigidities embedded in the system of international trade, which have always been to the disadvantage of weaker economies, an underlying reason given is the failure to rectify some of the distortions within African countries in their systems of economic management.

As we enter the new millennium, and in our quest to occupy our rightful place in a rapidly globalizing world, it is necessary that we redress some of these distortions and improve our systems of economic management. In the course of reflecting and deliberating on this issue, however, it is important that a critical appraisal is made of the approaches that have been promoted in the last decade, particularly in their impact to the welfare of the people and in fostering sustainable development. Ways of ensuring that reforms do not affect negatively the vulnerable groups have to be found.

Equally important is the need to take into account the reality of our countries and the cultural values of our peoples in establishing structures of good governance. It is only by associating the modalities of governance to the prevailing progressive values, and also in taking into account the obtaining conditions, can the people relate with the practices that are desired. Otherwise, the whole initiative remains suspended above them or it turns out to be an elitist undertaking.

To our external development partners, among the lessons obtained from the past decade is that the promotion of good governance can only be sustained if it evolves as a indigenous agenda that is internally driven. It can be supported by external partners, but not imposed from outside. And when it is supported, the assistance has to be transparent and balanced. Otherwise, it can generate tension and may end up counter-productively.

Permit me to conclude my statement by underscoring the fact that there is a positive dynamic unfolding in the continent. The recent experience in dealing with major conflict areas in various parts of the continent, point to the emergence of a solid foundation for the flourishing of good governance. The leadership role played by Africans in addressing these conflicts, and the indigenous content of their resolution confirm Africa's

resolve and capacity to take responsibility for our own destiny. These trends coupled with the consolidation of the democratic reforms and economic revitalization have a potential of becoming a powerful force. This conference can make a major contribution if it can be able to come up with recommendations on how we can harness this dynamic and direct it towards a speedy attainment of good governance and sustainable development.

I thank you all.