



**RESPONSE OF DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY
GENERAL OF THE OAU TO THE SPEECH ENTITLED
“AFRICA: TOWARDS THE 21ST CENTURY”
DELIVERED BY MR. JAMES D. WOLFENSOHN,
PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD BANK,
TUESDAY, 27 JANUARY 1998 AT AFRICA HALL
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

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Mr. K.Y. Amoako, UN Under Secretary General and
Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa,
Mr. James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank,
Representatives of the Government of Ethiopia,
Hon. Sufian Ahmed, Minister of Finance and other Ministers
of the Ethiopian Government here present,
Distinguished Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions
Resident in Addis Ababa
Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. President,

Since your appointment three years ago, we have followed with appreciation the scope of dialogue that you have unleashed in dealing with governments, business and non-governmental groups. We note that you have given special focus on the problems of the continent and that a new partnership is emerging between the World Bank and our continent. This new partnership takes into account the demands and aspirations of

the continent as well as the political, economic and social challenges that face us with the objective of providing a new impetus in our collective efforts to address these challenges. An eloquent manifestation of this new beginning was the two day Leaders Forum in Kampala which was hosted by President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda. This innovative exchange between African leaders and the President of the World Bank clearly marks a new era of cooperation and partnership between the Bank and Africa. At the very least it provided a unique opportunity for an in-depth exchange of views and thereby enabling the Bank to have a proper comprehension of the vision of African leaders on African development. The issues that you have addressed in Kampala including those which you have referred to in your address this morning – Infrastructure Development, Capacity Building, Regional Integration, Private Sector Development, Conflict Resolution and Good Governance are very relevant and of particular importance. We look forward to more exchanges of this nature in the future.

Mr. President,

As we tackle the problems facing Africa we are increasingly cognizant of the fact that the major resource of this continent is its people. In this regard we note that you have made the “people” the centre of your

declared partnership with your stakeholders based on the philosophy that in this shrinking global village, characterized by globalization and liberalization, the rich and poor countries are linked by a host of challenges that have no respect for national borders.

The tone of your speech and the clarity of the issues you have raised as well as the perspective you have developed concerning the African continent as it prepares to enter the next millennium testifies to your own commitment and that of the Bank to work with Africa as it endeavours to manage the transition to the 21st century.

Mr. President,

Under your leadership at the Bank we have observed greater sensitivity and concern for the problems of your poorest members. We note with appreciation that you have personally taken up Africa and Africa's socio-economic and financial problems as a challenge. You have, within three years of your assumption of office, taken steps to tackle the problem of multilateral debt which hitherto could not be raised as an issue for debate. Your clairvoyance and untiring efforts have been crowned with the multilateral debt relief initiative for the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). We recognize that there are certain shortcomings

with the HIPC initiative. However, we hope that with a little more flexibility in the interpretation of the new indicators in the debt analysis, more African countries should be able to benefit. In this regard we wish to call on the development partners of the World Bank to pay up their contributions to the HIPCs Trust Fund. We also call on these partners to demonstrate greater understanding and sensitivity to the debt burden facing African countries.

Mr. President,

We are also aware of your positive disposition to the efforts being made by the African countries in the economic reform programmes which they have been undertaking at very high social and political costs. In this regard, you did on your assumption of office respond swiftly to the request of African Finance Ministers by putting in place the programme "Partnership for Africa's Capacity Building Initiative" which was launched about two years ago. Your remarks this morning on capacity building were very apt.

Against this background, I am pleased to recall the rather incisive and illuminating discussions that you held with us at the OAU

Headquarters last Sunday during which we agreed to strengthen and promote cooperation between our two institutions.

Mr. President,

Let me before concluding reiterate the obvious. We appreciate your personal commitment in support of the development efforts in our continent and we look forward to intensified cooperation between the World Bank and African countries as we prepare ourselves to enter a new millennium. In this endeavour, you can be assured of the support not only of the Organization of African Unity but also its sister institutions – the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank with whom we work very closely and are determined to enhance our cooperation and effective coordination in the service of our continent and its people. One such area where our three institutions have agreed to work together is the fight against corruption in our societies. For we believe strongly that whatever its background, this scourge constitutes a serious impediment to Africa's development. Indeed it does more than that. It has the potential of destroying the very fabric of our societies by, inter alia, denying the vast majority of our people elementary justice.

In conclusion, I wish to echo what you have said about the determination of African leaders to assume fully their responsibilities – in all domains. Africa is determined to chart its own destiny. But it needs the support of friends – especially friends who understand the realities of the continent. In you, Mr. Wolfensohn, we are pleased to have such a friend.

I thank you for your kind attention.