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SAS/Notes, 08 November 1998

Note for the Record

Meeting between the Current Chairman (President Compaore)
and the Secretary General (Salim Ahmed Salim) of the OAU
with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Ato Meles Zenawi
Ouagadougou, November 8, 1998

This meeting took place immediately after our meeting with President Isaias. The meeting which was held at the villa of Prime Minister Meles was also attended by Foreign Minister Ablasse Ouedraogo and Ethiopia's Ambassador to Djibouti Madame Sahlework.

The meeting lasted from 1638 to 1705 hours.

Following is a resume of the discussion:

President Compaore

We have just met with the Eritreans. We have encountered the same situation. We have explained that the OAU cannot deviate from its principles. Of course we have heard (during the meeting) accusations against Djibouti by the President of Eritrea.

We have come here to thank you for your availability and your participation in the meeting as well as your confidence in our continental Organization. We are going to report to the OAU Central Organ at the Summit level next month on the outcome of our deliberations.

- We are convinced that you made a giant step forward here (sic). In the meantime we hope that both parties will continue to exercise restraint. For the time being we are going to transmit the text of the Proposals to the Heads of State of OAU Member States.

Secretary General Salim

I wish to recall your intervention this morning during which you asked for clarifications and were given. You then wanted that these clarifications be given to you in writing. The Committee has considered this. We have come to the conclusion that the Report of the proceedings of the meeting will have on record the clarifications that you sought and the response given.

Prime Minister Meles

Thank you for coming to see me and for your explanations. I want to express my gratitude for the efforts being made by our Organization through the Committee on finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

I am disappointed that we have not come to a reasonable understanding (at this meeting). I had hoped that a better understanding would emerge from the current efforts. Yet, I would be lying if I told you that I am surprised. It follows the pattern of disdain followed by the Eritrean leadership.

- On the specifics let me say that the document proposed and the clarifications that I sought and were given to me during the discussions have made me to accept tentatively the Proposals. I say tentatively because it is a question of war and peace and I have to refer the issue to my cabinet.

- Let me reiterate and recall my understanding on the clarifications given with respect to the areas we raised. These are :

- In respect of paragraph 3 of the Proposal refers to the armed forces presently in Badme Town and its environs. The forces referred to are the Eritrean Army. In other words the Eritrean armed forces have to withdraw.

- That Eritrean forces should withdraw from the territories they have occupied on May 6 and after.

- While President Mugabe (of Zimbabwe) had reservations on the militia (i.e. return of the Ethiopian militia with their weapons into the territory), law enforcement has to be the responsibility of the state. The role of the observer force would be that of assisting the Administration and not substituting itself for the State in this area.

These clarifications should also be transmitted to our colleagues the African Heads of State. This is important because since they have not closely followed the deliberations and intricacies of the issue, they may not be in a position to understand some of the provisions of the Proposals. If, I, as Prime Minister of my country who is directly involved, find it necessary to have clarifications it stands to reason that other leaders not directly involved may desire greater clarity. Thus it is important that these clarifications be dispatched simultaneously with the dispatch of the Proposals. I therefore hope that this will be part of the report to be submitted to the Heads of State of OAU Member States.

With respect to the appeals for restraint, I can only say that we shall continue to try our best to do so. But those who live in Addis Ababa – and I am confident that the Secretary General of the OAU will back me up on this – know that I am under enormous pressure. Much depends also on the provocation from the other side. During my recent visit to South Korea, the Eritreans made artillery bombardments at Sheraro. There were casualties. But we did not make this public. Then three days ago Eritreans artillery shelled Adigrat causing casualties. We kept quiet but a vigorous international media picked up the story... I am hiding the news from our own people in order to make it possible for us to exercise restraint. And I am promising that I will try to do my best to exercise restraint but I cannot guarantee. It also depends which village (or town) will be under attack. I am compelled to hide the killing of our people in the interest of exercising restraint!!

- In Addis Ababa, people were expecting war to commence in September i.e. at the end of the rainy season. It has not happened. I have been able to mollify my people by dangling the fruit of peace through the efforts of the OAU. But as the attainment of that fruit becomes more and more remote, the pressures are likely to mount.

- Let me again reiterate that we understand the Proposals to mean the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the territories they occupied as of May 6 (1998). It is also clearly understood that the observer mission (force) will assist the reinstated administration but will not take over the role of its law enforcement organs.

Secretary General Salim

The Prime Minister has suggested that the report containing the clarifications sought by Ethiopia should be sent together with the Proposals. This will not be possible. The Current Chairman is planning to send the Proposals to all his African colleagues (African Heads of State) as from this very evening. On the other hand the report of the Committee reflecting the views of both parties as well as the specific clarifications sought by Ethiopia will take some time. This report after being prepared by the Secretariat will have to be seen and okayed by the three Heads of State members of the OAU High Level Delegation, namely Presidents Compaore, Mugabe and Gouled.

The meeting ended at 1705 hours.

N.B. At this juncture, Foreign Minister Ablasse and I rushed to the airport to see off President Isaias only to find that the Eritrean leader had taken off. We were however able to see off President Mugabe whom we found at the VIP lounge.
