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ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL, H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM  
AT THE SECOND COORDINATION MEETING ON THE HUMANITARIAN  
ASSISTANCE FOR SOMALIA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

3rd December 1992

Your Excellency President Meles Zenawi,  
Your Excellencies Co-Chairmen of the Conference,  
Your Excellency, The Executive Secretary of the  
Economic Commission for Africa,  
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In less than two months after the International Community met in Geneva, we are meeting once again to express our solidarity with the Somali people devastated by a vicious civil war and starvation. I would like at the very outset to congratulate the organizers of this International Conference for this timely initiative. I would like to thank the United Nations which is deploying considerable efforts, to channel humanitarian relief to the people of Somalia and to promote a political settlement to the conflict there. The OAU is happy to have co-operated with the United Nations in efforts at finding a political solution. In particular I wish to thank the Secretary General of the UN, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali for the co-operation he has extended to the OAU throughout our joint undertaking in Somalia. May I also take this opportunity to say how much I appreciate the work done by Ambassador Sahnoun when he served as the Special Representative of the Secretary General. Through his patient but firm efforts, he made important progress in both the humanitarian and political fields.

At the same time, I am happy to see that Amb. Sahnoun was succeeded by a person of equal zeal and commitment in the name of Ambassador Ismat Kittani. I wish to reiterate the readiness and full disposition of the OAU to co-operate with him and his colleagues. I know both Ambassadors Sahnoun and Kittani well - being colleagues of long standing. I am sure we will put our friendship to mutual benefit of the organizations we serve, as we face the challenge in Somalia. I wish to recognize the important contribution made by Under Secretary General Eliasson in organizing this Conference and his role in mobilizing support and humanitarian assistance to Somalia.

I wish in particular to thank President Meles Zenawi and the Government of Ethiopia for hosting this Conference and for the untiring efforts which he continues to expend in search of a solution to the tragedy in Somalia; and for the generosity shown by welcoming and hosting the refugees from there. I am grateful to President Meles Zenawi for having been constantly available for consultations and advise on our collective efforts.

Equally, I wish to thank the countries of the Horn of Africa, which have, through their Standing Committee on Somalia, also deployed so much effort to assist in finding a solution to the crisis.

**Mr. Chairman,**

As a human being and an African I am outraged and shattered by the carnage in Somalia. The images of babies and adults, their bodies reduced to bare and brittle bones by starvation, those of many more dead from hunger, evoke feelings of total anger and frustration. I continue to anguish at the fact that human beings are subjected to such cruelty and even more at the fact that the rest of humanity can stand by and watch in apparent helplessness. The scenes of the Somali people, their humanity emasculated and their bodies laid to waste, must touch our conscience and evoke anger. Anger because human beings are capable of demonstrating more humanity than this and frustration because in spite of so much international effort and attempts the situation still defies solution.

The anger and revulsion we all feel to the tragedy in Somalia, must sensitize us to the need to find an urgent solution to the humanitarian crisis, as well as the other underlying problems which have compounded the situation. I realize there is no quick solution to the crisis. We shall need to proceed persistently and with determination to resolve all the questions which impinge of the conflict. The situation in Somalia is a complex mix of many problems which will have to be resolved globally if we are to find a lasting solution. We need to understand all



the issues and how they interrelate and produce such a complex problem in a country we all thought in the past to have the least reasons and likelihood to fall apart. In this connection, we highly value and appreciate the presence in this Conference of the Somali community leaders, political figures representing various factions as well as the Somali NGOs. We appeal to them to work among themselves and in concert with us all in search of a lasting solution to this crisis.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The tragedy in Somalia is multi-dimensional and must thus be resolved comprehensively, addressing all its facets. Failure to do so, or to neglect any one of them, will result into a partial solution with negative long term consequences to the future peace and stability of Somalia. For this reason, I see the principal objectives of this International Conference being four-fold.

First, this Conference must provide added opportunity for further sensitization and awareness building on the gravity of the situation in Somalia. While the International Community has awakened to the tragedy in that country, even if late, there still is need to ensure that the momentum for humanitarian assistance is sustained and that the frustration arising from the difficulties on the ground are not allowed to sap our enthusiasm to continue assisting. The need to sustain the international momentum is all the more so needed, given the many other tragedies, in the world, even if at lesser magnitude, but which need to be addressed nonetheless. We need to ensure that adequate resources are provided to deal with the Somali emergency.

The multiplication of conflicts in the world and the attendant need to devote time and resources to their resolution, will require that we demonstrate more resolve and commitment. We can not let fatigue set in, no matter the demands and the set-backs we may suffer. Ultimately our persistence, is the only weapon we have against the hurt and suffering which our fellow human beings are being subjected to in Somalia and elsewhere.

The people of Somalia need humanitarian assistance as a priority. We therefore must ensure that more food and medicines and other forms of humanitarian relief assistance continue to be mobilized. In this connection, I would like to express the appreciation of the OAU to all those countries, non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals who have contributed and continue to contribute to the humanitarian effort in Somalia. While commendable work has been and is being done in terms of mobilizing more relief assistance, a lot has yet to be done, given the gravity of the situation, the full extent of which we have not seen due to the problems of insecurity in the country. As the situation unravels, we are bound to see in greater detail, the full picture of the horrors of famine and war in the country. We should therefore use opportunity of this Conference, to plead on behalf of the people of Somalia, for added efforts at mobilizing assistance.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The Organization of African Unity has issued repeated appeals for assistance also from within Africa. I am encouraged to note that a number of countries in the continent have responded positively and contributed food, medicine, personnel and equipment. But more needs to be done within Africa to demonstrate in concrete terms that we care about the plight of our brothers and sisters in Somalia and that we are willing to share. I have said on many occasions that there may be misery and want in Africa generally, but not every African is starving and not everyone of them is poor. It is the need for Africa to tap into its own humanitarianism which I wish to emphasize. Africa is also capable, even in a limited way, to make some contribution. We can give food, medicine and indeed personnel to assist in the global humanitarian effort on Somalia. I therefore wish to take this opportunity to reiterate my appeal as well as to African Governments, institutions and individuals to demonstrate a spirit of solidarity and show in concrete ways that they care and they are willing to share with their kith and kin in Somalia.

Mr. Chairman,

The mobilization of humanitarian assistance is essential. It will be meaningful however only if that assistance reaches those in need, those who are facing imminent death from starvation. Of what use are tons of food which remain stock-piled in warehouses while only a few kilometres away people are starving? What is the use of sending food to Somalia if it ends up in the hands of vicious profiteers and armed bandits while people - in their thousands are forced to die of starvation?

The priority of the International Community in Somalia is to save lives. All the other objectives we seek to achieve are subordinated to the overriding imperative of ensuring that massive starvation is halted and peoples lives are preserved. Consequently, the second objective of this Conference, I see as how to evolve a mechanism by which it will be possible for International Community to ensure that the humanitarian assistance is delivered and reaches those to whom it is targeted. Attendant to this objective of delivering humanitarian assistance, is the challenge of dealing with the underlying and more daunting problem of insecurity.

Therefore, along with establishing a mechanism of ensuring delivery of humanitarian assistance, this Conference should examine how the International Community can respond to the challenge of insecurity in Somalia. It is in this context that I welcome the recommendation of the United Nations Secretary General for the United Nations to have an expanded security presence in Somalia. I hope that once an agreement will have been reached by the Council Members, the forces are deployed and fully operational, and humanitarian assistance is made to reach the starving people, the Security Council will have time to reflect on the long term role of the International Community in Somalia. In particular, I hope that the Council will be looking at its presence and role in Somalia on a long term perspective and not simply as a short term military operation restricted to a single objective with a time table or deadline. This is to say that I see the United Nations presence continuing through



the entire process - from halting starvation to restoring Somalia to her own feet. This is necessary given the absence of any central authority, and order. For unless, the United Nations presence is allowed to continue in support of efforts in the other aspects of the Somalia Conflict, it will not be possible to find any credible and lasting settlement.

**Mr. Chairman,**

While the objective providing humanitarian assistance including the associated problem of insecurity must rightly be our priority, we should pursue it in tandem with that of resolving the political problems which are at the heart of the conflict in Somalia. The crisis in Somalia is a political conflict which has degenerated into total anarchy and resulted into a humanitarian tragedy of horrendous proportions. The key to a lasting solution to the conflict is therefore necessarily political. This is why I am of the strong view that the third objective of this Conference must be to pursue and intensify the on-going efforts at finding a peaceful political settlement. We should look into how the political process can be re-dynamised and how more and more warring factions in Somalia can be brought together into a consensus for peace for their country. I note the presence of the leaders and representatives of the various factions at this Conference. Their presence is an encouraging sign and an indication that they are willing and disposed to go into dialogue to end the war in their country. The people of Somalia deserve and want a reprieve from the hopeless state they are in. The International Community is assisting in providing humanitarian assistance and will continue to expend efforts at promoting a political settlement. But the International Community can only help. Thus, the responsibility of ending war and retrieving Somalia and its people of the edge of oblivion rests entirely on the people of Somalia and in particular, those who claim to lead. The leadership of the Somali people - in all its manifestation, must demonstrate responsible leadership and have the courage to take the necessary political decisions of compromise in the interest of Somalia. Extremism, self-righteousness and lack of compromise will only throw

Somalia into deeper suffering. I once again urge the leaders in Somalia to look at what has become of their country - once proud and united, what is happening to their people, and ask themselves whether in all conscience, this must be allowed to continue.

At the international level, the Organization of African Unity, has continued to urge for political accommodation and compromise. I have met and consulted leaders and representatives of the various factions. In all my encounters, I have urged reason and political accommodation. I have at the same time expressed my readiness and the full disposition of the OAU to assist in any manner in the promotion of a political solution to the conflict. The OAU has and continues to work in co-operation with the United Nations, the Islamic Conference and the Arab League to find a political solution.

**Mr. Chairman,**

All these facets to the Somali conflict are linked and will, therefore, have to be dealt with together. Humanitarian assistance will not reach the people until the problems of insecurity are resolved. In turn, the problems of insecurity will not be conclusively resolved, unless the political problems underlying the conflict are resolved. But even after we will have achieved to steer Somalia into a political consensus ending war and restoring order, authority and the rule of law, we will have not conclusively and permanently resolved the undercurrents of the conflict unless those achievements are underwritten by a return of some basic prosperity to the people there. Somalia must be assisted to emerge from the ruins of the War. For unless the people are assisted, the exigencies of earning a living, and the imperative of survival, will throw the country back into chaos and anarchy. This is why I also think that



the fourth objective of this Conference must be to look ahead of humanitarian relief and political settlement to the stage of rehabilitating the country. War has destroyed everything. The economy has fully collapsed, there are no schools, no hospitals, no water supply, no electricity, not any means of communication. The entire infrastructure, has been destroyed. For these to be rehabilitated, the Somali people will need more than political accommodation or reconciliation. They will need massive resources, which they do not dispose. The International Community must therefore be prepared to demonstrate solidarity and respond to the challenge of helping Somali rehabilitate. This will not only be in assistance to the needy people of Somalia but also in preservation and consolidation of the peace and stability in Somalia which we are now so desperately searching for. Failure to respond adequately to the needs of reconstruction, will only undermine the achievements in which the International Community will have invested so much; and the weight of misery and economic hopelessness will throw Somalia back into anarchy.

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tragedy in Somalia, the spectre of such horrendous human suffering is an outrage and indictment to our humanity. It is true that the civil war and consequent famine is a result of a political conflict that has unfortunately engulfed that sister State. It is however equally true that we are collectively responsible for having allowed the situation to degenerate to tragic proportions before we responded in any meaningful way despite the early warnings of an impending human tragedy from many sources including non-governmental organizations. It is unfortunate that when the situation was still manageable and many lives could have been saved, the International Community did not live up to the challenge and

missed the opportunity for timely action. Had the world heeded the warnings and responded early, the extent of the tragedy could have been minimized. The tragedy of Somalia will continue to weigh heavily on our collective conscience as one case where we failed our own humanity. At the same time, the Somalia tragedy should be a lesson to humanity and a preventable failure which must never be allowed to occur again. Let therefore this conference be an opportunity to make the commitment never to allow another Somalia to happen; and never to allow mankind to endure such humiliation and suffering. Equally, at the end of the day, when the efforts of the International Community will have born fruit and Somalia is retrieved from the brink of extinction, we will also have erected firm foundations upon which a new Somalia will be built. These foundations should enable the people of Somalia to create a new society, which will not be vulnerable and susceptible to the circumstances which have led to the present tragedy.

I thank you.