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**CHIEFS OF DEFENCE STAFF
MEMBER STATES OF THE OAU
CENTRAL ORGAN
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**ADDRESS BY H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, SECRETARY
GENERAL OF THE OAU AT THE SECOND MEETING OF THE
CHIEFS OF DEFENCE STAFF OF MEMBER STATES OF
THE OAU CENTRAL ORGAN**

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SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU AT THE SECOND
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- Mr. Chairman, Maj. General Abubakar Abdulsalam,
Chief of Defence Staff of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,
- Hon. Minister of Defence, Representing the Current
Chairman of the OAU, General Zvinavashe, Commander
of the Defence Forces of Zimbabwe,
- Honourable Chiefs of Staff and
- Senior Officers of African Armed Forces,
- Excellencies,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to begin by joining Hon. MAHACHI, the Minister of Defence of Zimbabwe and Representative of the OAU Current Chairman, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, in welcoming you all to Harare. I would also like to register our profound appreciation and gratitude to the Government of Zimbabwe and to the Armed Forces for hosting this important Second Meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff and for the warm reception and generous hospitality accorded to us all. The commitment of the Government and people of Zimbabwe to the cause of African Unity and dignity as well as to the promotion and consolidation of peace and stability in our Continent provides a fitting environment for a serious, productive and successful session.

A little over a year ago, the first ever meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of Member States of the OAU Central Organ was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. You would recall that that meeting was convened following a decision by the Council of Ministers endorsed by the OAU Summit of 1995. Indeed, reacting to my report on the enhancement of Africa's capacity in peace-keeping, the Council of Ministers considered that Africa should seriously endeavour to develop and enhance its capacity in this important field to enable it participate in peace-keeping operations either under the aegis of the United Nations or, in exceptional circumstances, under the auspices of the OAU. Council recommended that OAU Member States set aside or earmark ready contingents to be given specialized training in peace-keeping and requested the Secretary-General to convene a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of Member States of the Central Organ to look into the technical issues related to peace-keeping.

This decision reached at the highest level of the OAU policy organs, was made against the background of the very disturbing trend, by the international community which was showing increasing reluctance to take part and contribute troops in peace-keeping operations in Africa. This trend was particularly obvious after the experience in Somalia. The situation was further compounded by the fact that even when the decision was made to deploy peace-keeping operation, critical time was lost in implementing that decision like in the case of Rwanda.

Council and Summit therefore considered appropriate to seek the advise of the Chiefs of Staff on how best Africa could set up ready contingents which could be deployed rapidly for peace-keeping purpose under the UN or in exceptional circumstances under the OAU. The Chiefs of Staff were also required to provide technical advise on how OAU could effectively discharge the responsibilities it was assuming through its peace missions such as the OAU Mission to Burundi.

During their meeting, the Chiefs of Staff, extensively reviewed the whole issue related to peace-keeping. They concurred with the principle of stand by arrangements and earmarked contingents on a voluntary basis to be deployed under the UN or in exceptional circumstances under the OAU or other sub-regional arrangements. The meeting recognized the need for proper preparation and the standardization of training. In this regard, it recommended that a working group of military experts from Member States of the Central Organ be set up to provide further clarity and to come out with practical and realistic proposals on the technical issues pertaining to peace-keeping. The meeting also recommended that there should be meetings of Chiefs of Staff of Member States of the Central Organ as and when the need arises. The outcome of the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff was submitted to the OAU Council of Ministers in Yaounde which requested the Central Organ to consider and follow-up as appropriate, their recommendations.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the first meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, a wave of new and potentially more devastating conflicts has inflicted many parts of our Continent. Never before have we witnessed so much carnage and human suffering in so many parts of our Continent. The scourge of conflicts seems to be spreading with untold consequences for millions of people. The most unfortunate aspect of this tragedy is that apart from a few cases like in Liberia, we have watched on helplessly, while the social fabrics of our societies are torn apart. The statistics paint a grim picture, but we are not only dealing with statistics, we are dealing with human lives, great human tragedies and security crisis, from the Great Lakes Region to Central Africa, and from West Africa to the Horn of Africa. These crisis have more than anything else, dramatized the complexity

of the problem and raised questions to which no African can afford to remain indifferent.

Furthermore, it is becoming clear that the International Community is showing great reluctance to be involved in African peace-keeping. The experiences of the Democratic Republic of Congo, formally Zaire and the recent development in the Republic of Congo, where in spite of expressed readiness of many African countries to contribute troops for United Nations Peace-keeping deployments, the International Community stood idly by, while thousands of Africans were killed, and infrastructure senselessly destroyed. We, as Africans, need to draw the appropriate lessons from our recent experiences in Rwanda, in Liberia, in Burundi, in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Congo Brazzaville. We should learn from the failure to anticipate and effectively prevent the crime of genocide in Rwanda, which resulted in the decimation of hundreds and thousands of our fellow human beings. We should learn from the inability of the United Nations Security Council to respond appropriately to the call by African leaders to deal with the crisis in the Eastern part of the former Zaire. In the particular case of Congo Brazzaville, we have failed to understand why despite the request made by the Chairman of the International Mediation Committee on Congo, President Omar Bongo of Gabon, for the deployment of a peace-keeping force, the Security Council failed to take a decisive action to deploy UN Peace-keeping Forces in that country even when a window of opportunity for such a deployment was evident.

All of these experiences lead me to the belief that OAU Member States can no longer afford to stand aloof and expect the International Community to care more for our problems than we do, or indeed to find solutions to those problems which in many instances, have been of our own making. The simple truth that we must confront today, is that the world does not owe us a living and we must remain in the forefront of efforts to act and act

speedily, to prevent conflicts from getting out of control. To be able to achieve these objectives, the OAU and Sub-Regional Organizations, along with the United Nations, should cooperate on enhancing the level of our preparedness, especially since we all have to deal with resource constraints. Our cooperation should include in particular, the important areas of standby arrangements or ready contingents. We also need to consider the pre-positioning of non-lethal equipments or logistics depots, joint training and the whole issue of encouraging staff exchanges between Military and Peace-keeping Academies.

I wish to repeat that while it is a fact that the principal responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security lies with the United Nations Security Council, our Continent should not be seen as avoiding its share of responsibilities in this area.

I am not unmindful of the serious constraints that confront our Continent. But having travelled the length and breadth of this Continent and having experienced at first hand, the determination of our peoples and leaders to assume their responsibilities for seeking solutions to African problems, I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind, in our ability to do more to end the carnage in our cities, towns and villages and in the process, end the stereotype portrayal of Africa as the Continent that is perpetually at war with itself.

My conviction is not unfounded. It is based on realities, two of which come readily to mind. For almost seven years, the countries of ECOWAS, in spite of the extreme economic difficulties that all of them were experiencing, pursued with grim determination and admirable courage, their efforts to end the conflict in Liberia. In the end, the courage paid off. In spite of all we have been complaining about logistics, funding and all the other problems that have constrained African peace-keeping, we have joined in to celebrate the rebirth of that great African country.

My second source of optimism of course stems from the fact that in this very Region of Southern Africa, we were able to mobilize the support of the entire African Continent and the rest of the world, to defeat the forces of colonization and racial bigotry in the form of Apartheid. Today, in this very hall with us, are some of the heroes of that Liberation Struggle. Today they are free men and women leading their countries to great heights. I put it to you, if those great comrades could confront the massive and more organized military might and establishments that were among the best in the world, how is it that we cannot do more to save the lives of our people around the Continent.

At a time when we are calling for the International Community to assume its responsibilities in maintaining peace, security and stability in our Continent, we should be able to convey an unequivocal message of a Continent ready to assume its share of responsibility. At a time when the International Community is willing to help in building an African capacity for peace-keeping and is launching initiatives in this field, Africa should be seen as a serious and responsible partner. We should be ready for cooperation wherever and whenever appropriate but we should make it abundantly clear that any such cooperation must be situated within the context of Africa's own priorities. Your meeting constitutes therefore, a unique opportunity to provide further clarity on what should be the role of our Continent in peace support operations and how best it can forge a continental capacity for peace-keeping.

We, at the OAU have, for sometime now, felt the need for regular consultations between African Military Leaders, as this has the advantage of widening the opportunity for the coordination of African policy in the area of peace and security in general, and peace support operations in particular. It is an uncontestable fact that the future of peace-keeping in Africa will be inextricably linked to the military support that national defence forces will be prepared to extend to a multinational framework. A regular meeting of the

highest decision making staff of national defence forces therefore, will not only enhance the level of commitment that our Member States are prepared to extend, but also and most importantly, raise the professional standards of peace-keepers and contribute to the overall objective of establishing common peace-keeping guidelines for Africa.

I wish to commend the Experts who have been meeting here in Harare over the last four days. I am quite cognizant of the fact that the extent to which their recommendations could and will be implemented in the future, depends on a number of factors. First of all, there is need to ensure a strong commitment on the part of Governments in Africa to assume a measure of peace-keeping responsibility in the Continent. Secondly, the pace at which the recommendations can be implemented will of necessity be dependent on the scope and complexity of the issues that are to be dealt with, the stage of development of peace-keeping in our Continent, the availability of resources and last but not least global politics revolving around concerns with international peace and security.

By their very nature some of these tasks can only be fulfilled in the long run. In this connection, it is important that we clarify our broad and specific objectives in relation to peace-keeping capacities and situate the attainment of such objective within given time frame. Our approach to the task must be planned, coordinated and systematic. However, in the immediate and medium terms, we must avoid moving in fits and starts, for if we procrastinate, there is a real possibility that we may be overwhelmed by proliferating crisis and external initiatives which as recent experiences have clearly shown, could lead to a dangerous dependence on external assistance that may in turn prove unreliable at a critical juncture and we may have to pay a very high cost in terms of lives and resources. The peace-keeping capacity that we are going to build of course must be an expression of a common African political will. I

believe that there is enough awareness of the common destiny of African States as well as the awareness of the dangers to African Unity and the achievement of lasting peace, stability and development from not taking collective action to preserve the security, unity and the cohesion of our Member States.

I am confident that the OAU will benefit tremendously from the contribution of your meeting to this important African collective endeavour.

I thank you.