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Organization of African Unity

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Seventh Ordinary Session of the Central
Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict
Prevention, Management and Resolution
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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STATEMENT BY DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU

- **Your Excellency Ato Meles Zenawi,
Prime Minister of the Federal
Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,**

- **The Hon. Dr. Stan Mudenge, Minister of Foreign Affairs
of Zimbabwe and Chairman of this Ministerial Session of
the Central Organ,**

- **Honourable Ministers,**

- **Excellencies,**

- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to extend a very warm welcome to the Ministers and all delegations attending this Seventh Ordinary Session of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution at Ministerial level. This Session of the Central Organ, takes place against a backdrop of several developments on the Continent, some of which have far reaching implications for the immediate, medium and long term peace, security and stability of Africa.

I am grateful that His Excellency Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has accepted my invitation to be here in order to give us the benefit of his counsel before this Ministerial Session begins its deliberations. We are honoured by his presence. We shall, as usual, be enriched by his deep insights on the problems of concern to our Organization. In particular, his clarity on what needs to be done to confront the various crisis that face our Continent, has consistently proved to be a valued source of inspiration, for which we are deeply appreciative.

Five months ago, the OAU Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government devoted considerable time and attention to many of the issues which, regrettably, are still on the Agenda of your meeting today.

At the time of the Harare Summit, there were expectations that the people of Burundi would be given a respite from the prolonged mayhem, insecurity and hardship being visited on them, which has resulted in so many of them moving across their national boundaries into an uncertain future. Collectively, we were hoping that the political

leaders of Burundi would heed the very strong appeals from Africa and outside, to engage in a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the long-running and slow motion civil war that currently afflicts that African country. The reality which continues to stare us in the face, is that Burundi today continues to witness a disturbing impasse in the negotiation process, with far reaching implication for peace, security and stability and with potential for further humanitarian tragedy in the region.

As we meet here in Addis Ababa, we must reiterate that the lasting solution to the current problems in that country, will only come, when all the parties to the conflict muster the necessary political will and courage to engage each other in an honest and transparent process of dialogue and negotiations. Our message to them should be clear and unequivocal: a military solution to the problem is elusive and self destructive and there is no alternative to constructive dialogue and negotiation. In this context, the OAU should redouble its efforts in support of a genuine peace process in that country working in close cooperation with the leaders of the region. At the same time, it is important to work towards the de-escalation of tension in the region.

In Sierra Leone, it was our expectation that the military junta which to the chagrin of all, chose Africa Day, May 25, to embark on their ill-advised adventure of undermining our modest efforts towards consolidating the democratic process in that country and the Continent would without delay and prevarication listen to the voice of reason. Regrettably, for some time, the military junta remained defiant and intransigent and in the process continued to inflict considerable suffering and pain on the people of Sierra Leone. Recently however, there have been encouraging developments. Here, I am referring to the peace plan agreed upon in Conakry on 23 October between the Junta and the Committee of Five - the cornerstone of which is the restoration of the democratically elected Government of President Tejan Kabbah in Sierra Leone.

It is, therefore, important that the Military Junta should fulfill its obligations under the six month peace plan. Africa and the international community at large should continue to provide firm support to the efforts of the ECOWAS countries and the Committee of Five. It is our hope that the United Nations would move speedily to work with ECOMOG in the area of disarmament and demilitarization as provided

in the Conakry Agreement. Three days ago, I met and had extensive discussions separately with the Chairman of ECOWAS, His Excellency the Head of State of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha and the President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. I reiterated our Organization's firm determination to work closely with the countries of the West Africa Sub-Region to ensure the realization of the objective which all our leaders set for themselves during the Harare Summit, namely, the restoration of constitutional legality in that country. This meeting of the Central Organ may consider how we can further enhance those efforts. Clearly, one practical contribution is for the OAU to assist financially, despite our modest means, the ECOMOG as it embarks on the demobilization of the combatants.

The recent developments in Comoros are a source of grave concern. These developments, if not contained, will go a long way to undermining one of the cardinal principles on which our Continental Organization is grounded and which has served well our Continent, its unity and cohesion. It is our fervent hope that the separatists in Anjouan will finally see reason and join their compatriots from the other Islands in a constructive dialogue aimed at finding a lasting solution to the

problems in that country. In this context, we are deploying sustained efforts to convene, as soon as possible, the proposed Conference on Comoros to serve as the forum for such dialogue.

In Somalia, we should continue to encourage and support the ongoing efforts aimed at helping the various Somali factions to come together and join in an all embracing, peace process in that country as initiated through the Sodore process. We commend the efforts being made in Cairo and we earnestly hope that the Somali leaders will make effective use of the opportunity offered to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue. In the meantime, I wish to seize the opportunity to reiterate my strong appeal to the international community at large to provide the much needed urgent humanitarian assistance to the victims of the floods that have imposed yet another terrible ordeal on the people.

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

The evolution of the conflict in the Republic of the Congo has saddened us. The killings and devastation that visited that African

country and the destruction of its capital Brazzaville has left scars which will take time to overcome. It is regrettable that all efforts aimed at bringing about a peaceful and negotiated solution to this conflict did not achieve the required objective. It is also regrettable that the window of opportunity for a peaceful resolution through *inter alia* the deployment of the peace-keeping force was left to pass. As we appeal for a spirit of accommodation and the forging of national reconciliation in that country, we must also urge for intensified humanitarian assistance for the people of the Congo as well as assistance for the reconstruction of their country. At the same time, we must draw the necessary lessons from the bitter experiences of conflict in that country as we must draw the right conclusions in respect of other conflict situations in our Continent.

At a time when many of our countries and the rest of the world are devoting considerable time and energy to consolidating economic development and integration to build stronger economies, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, we just cannot afford the continued hemorrhaging of our societies by men in arms. The real challenge before us therefore, is to ensure that the collective voice

of reason and peace, are not drowned by the drums of war, ethnic conflicts and different forms of intolerance. We must make the inevitable transition into the next millennium, as full and responsible partners with the rest of the International Community. We must do so as peoples willing and able to make a contribution to the efforts aimed at creating more propitious conditions for stability, growth and prosperity in what many have termed our global village. These were, clearly, the motivating factors behind the decision of our leaders, who in 1993 in Cairo, Egypt, established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. At the time, it was envisaged that with an enhanced institutional framework and capacity, our Continental Organization would be able to move beyond Ad-Hoc arrangements, to consolidate the collective efforts towards bringing peace and stability to those of our societies, that are unfortunately plagued by conflicts and civil strife.

We should draw lesson from the increasing reluctance we have observed on the part of the international community, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to rapidly and effectively respond to the requests by our Member States and our Continental Organization.

We should therefore re-emphasize the fact that the principal responsibility for the maintenance of international peace, security and stability lies with the United Nations and particularly its Security Council. While Africa stands ready to assume its share of responsibility, the United Nations should be seen in words and deeds to support its initiatives within the context of the indivisibility of international peace and security. At the same time, Africa cannot shy away from addressing the need to enhance its capacity to deal with conflicts in the Continent including peace-keeping.

The most recent meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the members of the Central Organ has provided good basis for our collective reflection on this important issue. Africa should also be able to react to the various initiatives being promoted in order to support Africa's capacity in peace-keeping while situating them clearly within the political framework and priorities of our Continental Organization as articulated by our leaders in Cairo in 1993 and subsequently, here in Addis Ababa in 1995.

Both the recommendations of the Harare Meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff as well as the report on the various initiatives aimed at enhancing Africa's capacity in the area of peace support operations are before this Session. I am confident that they will be given serious consideration.

We should also seriously reflect on the acute humanitarian crisis that have erupted as a direct result of conflicts in our Continent. The tragedies in the Great Lakes Region need to be examined deeply and in all their ramifications. They have brought about immense suffering to our peoples and they have generated misunderstanding and profound suspicion both within the region and in the international community. They have posed a major challenge to the governments in the region, to the humanitarian agencies and to the international community at large. The most recent problems which emerged between UNHCR and some countries of the region are, to a large extent, a manifestation of that atmosphere of misunderstanding and mistrust. I believe that while UNHCR should be able to implement its international mandate to protect and assist the refugees and displaced persons with the full cooperation of the countries concerned, the legitimate concerns of

political and security nature of both the countries of origin and those of asylum deserve proper consideration. It is in this spirit that the OAU has extended its cooperation to the UNHCR in seeking amicable and acceptable solution to the present unsatisfactory situation especially with respect to the relations between the UNHCR and some of the countries of asylum and those of origin.

I believe firmly that it is both in the interest of Africa and the international community for the UNHCR to be enabled to pursue its mandate. I equally believe that for this important Humanitarian Agency to fulfill its responsibilities, the legitimate concerns and sensitivities of all countries concerned have to be fully appreciated and taken into account. That is why with a view to achieving this objective and within the context of the implementation of the Burundi Plan of Action, we are hoping to convene a consultative meeting here in Addis Ababa in the very near future - possibly in February next year, on how best our common objectives can be realized and the various concerns addressed. In all that, I am in regular consultation with High Commissioner, Madame Sadako Ogata. We are also in continuous consultation with the

leaders and officials of the region as well as with the OAU Commission of Twenty on Refugees.

As we survey the developments in our Continent, it is clear that great challenges lie ahead. As this Ministerial Session begins its deliberations, I am confident that it will not only address itself to the specific conflicts - from Somalia to Sierra Leone and from Comoros to Burundi. Rather it will look at the larger picture - the problems of conflict resolution, the humanitarian dimensions of these conflicts as well as the important, but often ignored phase of post-conflict building.

I thank you.