

Message of Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim at the Special Farewell Dinner Event in Honour of Dr. Assefa Bequele, Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum

**8th July 2010, at 6.30 p.m. Hilton Hotel
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

At the very outset, I would like to convey my sincere regret that due to circumstances beyond my control, it has not been possible for me to join you for this special event to honour Dr. Assefa Bequele who is stepping down after years of distinguished leadership as Executive Director of The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF).

I am particularly sad to be absent on this occasion considering my many years of association with Dr. Assefa. Indeed I have had the privilege of interacting with him from the very early days when he conceived the idea of establishing the African Child Policy Forum. This was almost ten years ago. Since then he has moulded, developed and put the ideas to action. It has been for me a singular honour to have been involved in the unfolding process and to have served as the first Chairperson of the International Board of Trustees. ***One could say that I have been there “since the creation”.***

When several months ago, Dr. Assefa confided in me on his desire to “**retire**” from the leadership of the Organisation, I was taken aback with shock and disbelief. After all, his role in the establishment and development of the organisation was so pivotal that it was almost inconceivable to think of the ACPF without Assefa. However, as he explained the personal reasons which led him to take this decision I understood, respected and supported his decision. Indeed apart from his personal reasons, I

believe that his decision was also based on his clear understanding that Institutions like countries are bigger than individuals. This example of leaving when his services and leadership continue to be needed and highly valued is remarkable and important when we consider that there are some in our continent who cling to leadership in perpetuity and any cost.

Having said that, let me make it quite clear that for the International Board of Trustees of ACPF, the Secretariat and myself, the departure of Dr. Assefa from the active leadership of ACPF has not been an easy development to accept. We all appreciate the commitment of Dr. Assefa in establishing this important and perhaps unique Forum in Africa to put the rights of the African children on the policy agenda nationally, regionally and internationally.

Through ACPF, Dr Assefa found a platform to forge ahead his ideas on how the well being of the child in Africa can be improved or even changed through dialogue with governments, and other organizations dealing with children. He did this in the knowledge and firm belief that Africa's future political, economic, social and cultural development is dependent on how well we care, love, cherish, and protect our children. Thus, he tirelessly spent his time encouraging governments and other stakeholders to put children at the centre of their policies, create legal mechanism to protect the child and having the child in our minds as a priority in our planning, and budgeting.

Under his stewardship and with the full support of the Board and his colleagues in the secretariat, the African Child agenda was able to receive both continental and international recognition and so has the organisation. In the years that I have worked with him I have been highly impressed by his personality, impeccable integrity as

well as his unequivocal commitment and total devotion to the cause of the African Child.

In the course of his work, Dr. Assefa has made an invaluable contribution in changing mindset, from considering the child as a second class citizen, to bringing them to the fore-front in public agenda. He values research, information and knowledge sharing as the main tool for change. His creative leadership and immense contributions which have been manifested inter alia in the publications of seminal documents such as The African Report on Child Wellbeing and major international policy conferences on critical issues affecting the rights of the child in Africa are part of his legacy. As he steps aside, he is leaving the organization on a sound foundation. On a personal level I have benefited from his friendship and cooperation.

There is no doubt that Dr. Assefa's departure is a great loss to the AFCP. We are however encouraged by his readiness and continued commitment to supporting the Institution's efforts as and when time and circumstances permit him. So in a sense this is not Goodbye but Aurevoir. We are also encouraged that the Institution is now under the capable hands of the new Executive Director Mr. David Mugawe who has been a close colleague of Dr. Assefa for quite sometime and who has his full trust and confidence as he has the trust and confidence of all of us in the International Board of Trustees. To Ato Assefa I wish to say thank you my dear brother and friend for your outstanding services and contribution. And to my brother David, let me on behalf of all the members of the Board bid you a warm welcome.

Finally, I thank you all for taking time to come together to celebrate and honour this outstanding son of Africa and mark the transition within ACPF.