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Organization of African Unity

Localizing Outbreaks: The Role of Regional Organizations in Preventive Actions

Introductory Remarks

*Paper Presented by Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General
of the Organization of African Unity at a Symposium on
Preventive Diplomacy: The Therapeutics of Mediation*

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to have been given this opportunity to participate in this Symposium on *Preventive Diplomacy: The Therapeutics of Mediation*, organized by the Centre for International Health and Cooperation, and to present a paper on *Localizing Outbreaks: The Role of Regional Organization in Preventive Diplomacy*. I am, indeed, grateful to Dr. Kavin M. Cahill, President of the Centre for International Health and Cooperation for inviting me to participate in this Symposium. It is gratifying to be at a gathering which has brought together prominent personalities with varied backgrounds and responsibilities to discuss the issue of Preventive Diplomacy from different perspectives. There is no doubt that the theme of the Symposium is important, topical and timely.

There are at least two good reasons why the OAU finds this Symposium timely and indeed significant. The first is that the convening of the Symposium comes at a time when Africa, more than ever before, is committed to finding peaceful and lasting solutions to the prevalence of conflicts in the region. Indeed, the continent is mounting concerted efforts aimed at resolving conflicts in Africa that have been raging and undermining the potential of the Continent for rapid reconstruction and development, especially over the last decade.

As a result of those conflicts, millions of our people have been forced to exile and to flee their countries to become refugees, while millions more are without clean water and improved health and sanitation services. More still have been forced to abandon their educational and economic activities and this has had serious impact on their livelihood. Apart from the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent people, conflicts in Africa have devastated vast areas, caused food and health emergencies and wide spread disruption of economic activities, social services, and productive use of resources.

The Symposium therefore provides an opportunity for us in the OAU to share our views, express our concerns and put in context the efforts of the Organization of African Unity and its Member States in addressing conflict situations in the Continent. These efforts have converged to and revolved around the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution which was established by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Cairo in 1993. In establishing the Mechanism, Africa has demonstrated its commitment and determination to assume its responsibility in addressing the scourge of conflicts in the Continent. Indeed, the Mechanism has provided our Continent with an instrument for peace, security and stability.

The second reason why the OAU finds this Symposium important and timely relates to the fact that, it comes at the time when the OAU is engaged in exploring the best ways and means of enhancing the operational capacity of its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. In this context, efforts are being deployed to establish, within the OAU, an Early-Warning System to enhance the capacity of the mechanism in

anticipating and preventing conflicts. I am aware that a lot of work has been done in the area of preparedness and prevention by scholars and policy makers in the field of public health. I am therefore convinced that the experience in the field of public health with respect to emergency preparedness and early-warning as well as the contribution by the various participants in this symposium could be useful in conflict prevention.

Mr. Chairman,

Against this background, the paper I have submitted on *Localizing Outbreaks: The Role of Regional Organization in Preventive Action* attempts to illustrate the role of the OAU in Preventive Diplomacy. The paper is predicated on the premise that, while the United Nations has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the UN Charter assigns special responsibility to regional organizations in matters related to the maintenance of regional peace and security. In this regard, the major role of the UN and the OAU in preventive diplomacy have, by and large, been complementary.

In this connection, the OAU recognizes the UN as a valuable instrument for authorizing and coordinating preventive action at the global level. Equally, the UN recognizes the OAU as a regional arrangement with specific mandate to coordinate regional efforts aimed at localizing outbreaks.

In the paper, I have also attempted to document the experience of the OAU in dealing with both intra and inter-state conflicts. I have, on the basis of the experience of the OAU in Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Rwanda, Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Western Sahara tried to illustrate the role of the OAU in localizing outbreaks. Of course, the paper is not exhaustive of all efforts being made by the OAU in dealing with conflicts in the Continent. The OAU has been engaged in quite diplomacy aimed at defusing tension and preventing outbreaks. In this respect, the OAU has been helpful in preventing outbreaks in countries such as Gabon and Congo. The OAU has also been playing an important role in preventing conflicts through its

support to the democratization process in Africa and its involvement in observing and monitoring elections in the Continent.

Mr. Chairman,

It is obvious that the United Nations and especially the Security Council have a primary responsibility and a global mandate for the maintenance of international peace and security. Indeed, the international community has been supporting the United Nations in its efforts to maintain peace and security in different parts of the world including Africa. In fact, over the years, the UN has met with new challenges and has assumed new and diverse responsibilities in the discharge of its Charter obligations.

But, the efforts of the international community in supporting the UN may be more productive if they were structured to complement the efforts of regional organizations such as the OAU. Indeed, the UN Charter provides that internal and inter-

state disputes of regional character should as much as possible be settled within the framework of regional organizations. This means that the international community has both moral and legal obligation to support the efforts of regional organizations, in preventing and/or localizing outbreak of conflicts.

The experience of the OAU is that the support by the international community has not always been commensurate with the magnitude of the problems in Africa. This is manifestly clear for example, with regard to the efforts deployed by the OAU and ECOWAS countries to address the conflict situations in Burundi and Liberia respectively.

The OAU has deployed considerable and sustained efforts in Burundi since the beginning of the crisis. These efforts led to the deployment of a military and civilian mission in that country with the objective of building confidence among the various segments of the society in Burundi. The Mission has since its arrival in Burundi, more than two years ago, tried, despite its serious financial and technical difficulties, to discharge its

responsibilities. The OAU operation in Burundi, I must emphasize, is a major initiative by our Continental Organization which has invested a significant proportion of its meagre resources to sustain its mission in that country.

But, the OAU initiative in Burundi is being threatened by lack of resources. The OAU has so far spent more than US\$7 million in that country. This amount might seem small, but it represents 25% of the total annual regular budget of the OAU. Of course, part of this amount has come from voluntary contributions made by countries within and outside Africa. At this juncture, I wish to stress that strong voices both from within Africa and from the international community want OAU to remain in Burundi. This position has been consistently made on all occasions. However, this appeals need to be backed by the corresponding financial and technical support. Unfortunately, this has not been always the case. For instance, the mandate of the OAU Mission in Burundi has just been extended for a period of three months while we have no financial resources to sustain it.

Liberia is another example of a major initiative by Africa in addressing conflict situation through sub-regional efforts. The involvement of ECOWAS countries in the conflict in Liberia with the strong support and backing of the OAU has also been commended as a major and positive African initiative. The efforts deployed by the Member States of ECOWAS in trying to bring about a lasting solution to the conflict in Liberia is, indeed, a manifestation of the determined and concerted efforts by the African peoples to put an end to the scourge of conflicts in the Continent. Africa has, on more than one occasion, appealed for financial and logistical support to assist ECOMOG in carrying out its mandate in Liberia. However, the reaction of the international community has not also been commensurate with the general expectations.

It is important to underscore the fact that the process of disarmament, encampment, demobilization and reintegration of combatants in Liberia has been stalled, mainly for lack of resources. Indeed, the entire peace process in that country could become greatly compromised if the requisite resources are not

forthcoming. Following the pledging conference on assistance to Liberia held here last October, several countries made pledges to support efforts aimed at reconstruction and rehabilitation and to assist ECOMOG operations. But, even the little financial commitments to ECOMOG have not been finally realized. As a result, the efforts made by ECOWAS in the search for a lasting solution to the conflict in Liberia have been seriously constrained. The most recent unfortunate developments and the resumption of hostilities among the factions in Liberia is a clear illustration of the fragility of the peace process in that country. It is also a clear message to the international community which needs to take its commitments more seriously. The implementation of the Abuja Agreement besides requiring the cooperation of the Faction Leaders clearly need a strong, well equipped and effectively provided ECOMOG Force.

Mr. Chairman,

While Africa has a specific role to play in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in the region, the international community cannot exonerate itself from its responsibility of lending equal support to those regional efforts aimed at localizing outbreaks. It is my earnest hope that Burundi and Liberia and other conflicts in Africa will be given appropriate attention and treatment.

Since conflicts have the same effect on human beings and their development activities, a collective approach to preventing conflicts is imperative. Selective and differentiated approach and commitment to solving conflicts undermines the spirit of the UN Charter. There is need for greater cooperation and coordination of efforts at all levels in dealing with conflicts whether of global or regional character. To this end, the UN and the OAU, with the support of the international community, must continue to work together in addressing conflict situations in

Africa. We live in an inter-dependent world and a better management of inter-dependence will be greatly enhanced as we work towards building a true global partnership for peace.