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Organization of African Unity

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**Introductory Remarks by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim
Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity
at the Symposium on the Commemoration of
the 5th Anniversary of Genocide in Rwanda**

Addis Ababa, 7 April 1999

Your Excellency, Dr. Pascal Ngoga. the Ambassador of Rwanda
in Ethiopia,

Your Excellency, Ambassador Joseph Mutaboba, Former
Chargé d'Affaires, Rwanda Embassy in Ethiopia and
Permanent Representative to the United Nations,

Your Excellency, K.Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary,
UN Economic Commission for Africa,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is five years today since close to a million of our brothers and sisters, daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, lost their lives in the most inhuman way, at the hands of their fellow countrymen and women. This ghastly event will forever haunt us and evoke the indictment to our collective humanity as we recall how the world watched with horror but did very little, if anything at all, to stop the brutal and systematic decimation of a people. The genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994, will remain the most disturbing chapter in the history of our Continent.

As we meet here today to commemorate that sad moment in our history and to remember the many lives that were lost in the most senseless and brutal manner, we cannot help but continue to ask ourselves why did it happen? How could such a grave and heinous crime be perpetrated in this day and age. Yet

solemn commemorative occasions like this should not just be opportunities for reflection and lamentation of what happened. Rather, they should be used to solidify our resolve that never again shall we allow such monstrosities to be committed in our continent or anywhere in the world.

It is gratifying to note that during the past five years, apart from expressing our outrage, revulsion and indignation over what happened between April and June 1994, both the people of Rwanda and their Government have tried to come to terms with the terrible legacy of genocide. In this context, they have taken important steps aimed at achieving sustainable peace and harmony in Rwanda. We have supported these efforts as we have supported measures taken in concert with the international community aimed at bringing to justice the perpetrators of this monstrous crime. We in the OAU have also endeavoured to support the various initiatives taken by the Government of Rwanda in fostering national reconciliation.

As a clear demonstration of Africa's continued concern and care, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting in Ouagadougou in June 1998, endorsed the establishment of an International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and its Surrounding Events in the Great Lakes Region – an initiative which was originally launched here in Addis Ababa in 1997 by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The main objective of the Panel is to draw lessons from the events related to the tragedy in Rwanda, with a view to preventing its recurrence. As I have stated in another

occasion, one needs to look around our Continent and to consider the current and other potential conflicts to discern that the potential for future tragedies is real, if appropriate preventive measures are not taken. In the particular case of Rwanda, apart from drawing lessons for the future, the outcome of the Panel is also expected to contribute towards the promotion of national healing, reconciliation, and cohesion in the country. I am confident that the Panel led by the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire and whose membership include men and women of international stature and impeccable integrity, will live up to the enormous challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we observe the 5th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, we should use this occasion also to reaffirm our determination and resolve that we will do everything in our means to ensure that such a horror does not happen again in our Continent. Africa and the international community should take this opportunity to consider and promote practical solutions in helping the Rwandese people overcome the socio-economic, political and psychological difficulties of the post-genocide society. We, at the OAU, remain confident that with their own exemplary resolve, complemented with international support, the people of Rwanda will overcome the dark days of the genocide and enter into the new millennium with a more profound sense of unity, brotherhood and togetherness.