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Organization of African Unity

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**UNITED STATES-AFRICA MINISTERIAL:
PARTNERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Statement by
the Secretary General of the Organization
of African Unity, Dr Salim Ahmed Salim**

Washington, D.C.

16 March 1999

Madam Secretary of State,
Secretary General Kofi Annan,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A year ago this week, President Clinton came to Africa, visited various capitals, consulted with our leaders, met our people, and paid homage at our sites of joy and agony. The symbolism and significance of this visit need hardly be over-emphasized. At a time when global dynamics seemed to marginalize the African continent and its people, his visit demonstrated a reaffirmation of the historical affinity between the US and Africa. It signaled a commitment to support our efforts to lift our people out of poverty, to build viable economies and societies based on open markets and democratic practices. The message that the President conveyed was not only reassuring but also reinvigorated our resolve to stick to our commitment to economic and political reform, notwithstanding the challenges and setbacks that are inherent in political and economic transition.

Indeed, President Clinton and his delegation would have observed while visiting us that we in Africa have embarked on a trajectory of change. We have set our sights on no less than a comprehensive process of transformation aimed at creating opportunity for our people, maximising the utility of our factors of production, revitalising our institutions of governance and enhancing our capacity to engage in global transactions. No effort is being spared, every pain is being endured, in initiating the fundamental changes in all political and socio-economic spheres so as to enable us attain these objectives.

On the economic front, we are beginning to arrest the precipitous economic decline that threatened to engulf us during the 1980s. We are taking advantage of complementarities between the public, private and civil sectors. Indeed, in almost all African countries today, the State is gradually relinquishing the heavy responsibilities it had to assume at the time of independence. We are creating the right climate for the private and civil sectors to take on a leading role in our development effort. We continue to restructure our economies to build production capacity and to enable us to reap the gains of efficiency, taking into account the challenges of globalization and technological change.

As a further affirmation of our determination to take full responsibility for the ownership of our development endeavours, we have also embarked on a strategy of regional economic integration through the establishment of the African Economic Community. Our basic objectives, in this regard, are to streamline and liberalise our sectoral policies and regulatory instruments; overcome the limitations of our small country markets; and to create a learning ground or springboard for more effective participation in global markets. To this end, we have also established regional economic communities in all five regions of our continent, each with a potential market size of over 100 million people.

On the political front, profound changes are also taking place with respect to governance. Nearly all African countries are involved in a serious effort aimed at the reform of the institutions of government, fostering accountability and legality, engendering administrative efficiency and effectiveness, the promotion and protection of human rights and more generally, opening up of the political space.

In 1993 Africa established a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within the framework of the OAU. This is an instrument that is devoted to anticipating and preventing conflicts, and also to seeking a peaceful and speedy resolution when they occur. Even at this formative stage, the Mechanism is proving its usefulness in providing the basis for a rapid continental response to conflict situations and in forging a collective approach to conflict resolution. I would like to convey our appreciation to President Clinton's Administration for the support that the United States has extended to the work of the Mechanism.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been necessary to highlight the steps that we have taken to assume full responsibility for our destiny as a people and to underscore the point that the dynamic of change is gaining momentum in our continent. We fully recognize that change cannot be imposed from outside the continent. Rather, ownership of the development process, broad political participation, and consensus on the objectives to be pursued must all come from within.

In this context, our vision for the role of our friends and partners from outside the continent is one of understanding, appreciation and support for our development efforts. This implies an important and critical role for our partners through the sharing of experience, knowledge, technology and the provision of resources in support of the home grown objectives for the sustainable transformation of economy and society. It also implies addressing some of our major constraints such as finding a lasting solution to the debt issue and ensuring adequate flows of official Development Assistance. We believe also that our partners will contribute towards the fostering of peace, security and stability and towards improving the well-being of the African people, as well as towards the realization of their legitimate aspirations for greater freedom, through popular participation and good governance.

I should hasten to underscore that partnership with Africa is neither a liability nor a philanthropic exercise. Support to the transformation of Africa today generates long term returns for all. Furthermore, such partnership is part of building a global society in which prosperity is shared, peace and security assured and the profound environmental challenges we face are adequately met.

It is my fervent hope that US-Africa partnership will make a major contribution to fostering a proper understanding of Africa's interests and its potential. Far too often, African interests are either ignored or distorted in global interactions. Our setbacks are overly projected at the expense of our successes. This has not only undermined our efforts at change but also has contributed to increased transaction costs and missed opportunities.

Africa's partnership with America should transcend these distortions. The relationship should balance the profit motive with the transformation imperative. It should assist Africa in revitalising its productive capacities, in promoting economic integration, in overcoming marginalization, in dynamizing its institutions of governance, and in promoting peace, security and stability. The challenge before us is to design the modalities that will harmonise the fundamental interests in the partnership.

Africa needs the support of the United States in developing its infrastructure, in modernising its core sectors, in gaining access to research and development and in creating an attractive climate for private investment. However, if the long-term benefits of US-Africa

relations are to be assured, the partnership must be anchored within the overall dynamic of socio-economic transformation in Africa.

I wish to conclude by underlining the fact that US-Africa partnership offers a unique opportunity of linking the most advanced country in the world with a continent of tremendous potential. The gains for such an association is infinite, provided we learn from the experience of similar initiatives, avoid the pitfalls, maintain a clear vision of our aspirations, and build the partnership on a solid foundation of mutual interest.

Thank you.