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STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
Dr. SALIM AHMED SALIM
AT THE INAUGURAL MINISTERIAL MEETING
OF THE CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE MECHANISM FOR THE PREVENTION,
MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT
AFRICA HALL, ADDIS ABABA

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Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish from the outset to welcome you all to this inaugural session of the Central Organ of the Mechanism for conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

It is a historic session as it is taking place at a time of growing crises in our continent, and a growing expectation on the part of the African people that the OAU live up to the challenges facing Africa. It is also occurring at a time of change in the international climate, when the international community is expecting the OAU to play an increased and enhanced role in tackling Africa's problems. Put differently, even if Africa chose not to deal with conflicts raging within the continent for lack of resource and/or capacity, the reality of the world today provides us with no other alternative than to address them effectively. Fortunately Africa did indeed, and consciously so, decide to take up the challenge.

This meeting is seized with an agenda focusing on the operationalization of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Among the issues to be addressed are the mobilization of resources and the strengthening of the Secretariat capacity. In dealing with these issues, we are indeed laying the foundations of the Mechanism. Indeed, it is only with solid and firm foundations that the Mechanism would be able to support and sustain Africa's quest for peace, security and stability.

I am aware, from my contacts, that Africa can count on considerable good will, understanding and support as demonstrated by the growing cooperation between the OAU and the United Nations as well as by the willingness and readiness of many other institutions and individual countries, to work closely with the OAU and support its efforts that are geared towards preventing, managing and resolving conflicts on the continent.

This is a positive and encouraging development. However, I would like to take advantage of this inaugural session to state my firm and sincere conviction that there can be no substitute for Africa's own effort and sacrifice. It is indeed my belief that primary responsibility for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in Africa lies with Africans themselves. We should therefore devise ways and means of equipping ourselves with the necessary resources - human, financial and otherwise -- in order to enable us to carry out this important responsibility. In the same vein, we should be able to provide our continental organization with the requisite means for it to fulfil the mandate entrusted to it.

Fortunately, the Organization is operating under a favourable climate as evidenced in the growing support and confidence repositied in it, by Member States. Our leaders are clearly supportive of an enhanced role for the OAU in the search for peace, security and stability in the continent. At the same time, the peoples of Africa are expressing their confidence and urging the OAU to play a more central role in African affairs. I am personally comforted by this political disposition on the part of our leaders and our peoples. However, we must be able to translate this climate of goodwill and expectation into concrete action in the service of peace, in the various areas of conflicts and hotbeds of tension in our continent.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your meeting may wish to exchange views on how the Mechanism can react promptly and swiftly to crisis situations in our continent. And, as I stated earlier, you are convening at a time of numerous crises.

You are no doubt familiar with the situation and the unfortunate developments in Angola. Our Organization has consistently supported the elected Government of that country. The OAU has also constantly expressed its readiness to assist in promoting dialogue and a political solution to the crisis between the Government and UNITA. It has also expressed its commitment to the pursuit of the peace process in conformity with the Bicesse Accords, and the results of the internationally supervised elections in that country, and in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions. We are therefore encouraged with the reports of the impending resumption of dialogue between the Government of Angola and UNITA in Lusaka, Zambia.

In Mozambique, we are facing the challenge of buttressing the peace process and sustaining international support aimed at ushering in peace, security and stability in that country. In this regard, President Joachim Chissano and the Government of Mozambique should be commended for their statesmanship and sense of

compromise. RENAMO and its leader Mr. Alfonso Dlakhamu should equally be encouraged to continue to extend its cooperation in pursuit of the peace process.

In Liberia, we are concerned over recent differences that have emerged among the various factions regarding the membership and composition of the transitional institutions. It is our fervent hope that these differences will be settled soon so that we can move forward with the implementation of the Cotonu Agreement. In this regard, I would like to report that intense efforts have been deployed in order to secure additional troops for the expanded ECOMOG. I have been personally in touch with some of our leaders who expressed their readiness to contribute troops to ECOMOG.

In Sudan, we have been encouraged by the decision recently adopted by the IGADD Summit here in Addis Ababa to set up a committee led by President Arap Moi of Kenya to promote a solution to the conflict in Southern Sudan. The efforts of the IGADD countries deserve our full support as it is our fervent hope that lasting peace can be restored in the Sudan.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,

You have also followed developments in the Congo. You are no doubt aware of the efforts deployed by the OAU right from the early stages of the crisis. Indeed, the OAU, through the special mission I dispatched to Brazzaville, played an important role in defusing the tension in that country. This was made possible thanks to the active support and laudable contribution of H.E. El Hadji Omar Bong, President of Gabon. The OAU also participated actively in the supervision of the first and second rounds of legislative elections in those constituencies for which the results were in dispute. The OAU through judges from Guinea and Benin is also taking part in the Arbitral Tribunal to review cases of election results which are a subject of controversy. We continue to follow the situation closely and stand ready to extend our assistance to the Government of Congo, the Opposition and all other political forces to enable them to overcome their present difficulties and differences.

The case of Rwanda is very encouraging. Despite all the difficulties and obstacles which we faced often due to our lack of experience and resources, the OAU, with the cooperation of Member States particularly those of the region and those which contributed troops to the Neutral Military Observer Group (NMOG), was able to sustain its efforts at peace in that country. These efforts culminated in the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement between the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front. Since the adoption of the Security Council resolution providing for the establishment of a peace-keeping force in Rwanda, we have embarked on the process of winding up NMOG whose elements were subsequently integrated into the UN mission in Rwanda.

I personally visited Rwanda at the end of October and held discussions with the President and members of the Rwandese Government as well as with the RPF leadership. I seized the opportunity to convey OAU's appreciation to the Government of Rwanda and to the RPF leadership for the confidence they placed in the OAU and the cooperation they extended to it throughout the process of negotiations. I would like to urge them to maintain the same commitment to the implementation of the peace agreement and to extend the same cooperation to UNAMIR. As evidence of its continued support to the peace process, the OAU has decided to maintain a small liaison office in Rwanda for a transitional period of six months.

The experience in our efforts at promoting peace in Rwanda is very enriching and instructive. It is a fine example of what Africa and its continental organization can achieve, given the positive disposition and cooperation of the parties to the conflict, given also, the support of African countries themselves as well as the support of the International Community. We have learnt a lot both positively and negatively and we shall draw the necessary conclusions. In the meantime I wish to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to all those who have helped us to make this achievement possible. My special thanks go to the Government of Tanzania as Facilitator, the government of Zaire as Mediator and all other neighboring countries as well as those countries namely Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Congo and Tunisia, which have contributed forces to NMOG. I wish also to thank the Governments of Belgium, France, Germany and USA for their contribution and support without forgetting the financial contribution made by the Governments of Nigeria, Namibia and Lesotho. Above all I wish to place on record my appreciation for the crucial financial and material contribution made by the Government of Rwanda.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now wish to turn to Somalia and to the tragic situation which continues to prevail in that country. It is not my intention to dwell on OAU's efforts since the eruption of this unfortunate tragedy. Suffice it to say that the OAU and its Member States did play a major role in securing the involvement of the international community, in the efforts to restore peace and security in Somalia. The OAU welcomed this involvement and extended its full support and cooperation to the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNISOM).

Unfortunately, the hopes raised by the UNOSOM Operation and the Addis Ababa Agreement signed by 15 Somali factions could not be sustained. The unfortunate incident of June 5th, 1992 in which 24 Pakistanis and many Somalis lost their lives, and subsequent

confrontations between UNOSOM forces and General Aideed's supporters further aggravated the situation. At the time, the OAU did express its profound concern over these developments and urged the UN to review its operations in Somalia so as to minimize as much as possible the loss of human lives.

At the same time, throughout the evolution of the somali crisis in the aftermath of the UNOSOM establishment and its confrontation with the forces of SNA, we have consistently maintained that it would be wrong for the international community to ignore any faction or to be perceived to be opposed to any particular group. We have made it clear that for a durable and lasting solution to be achieved all factions must be involved.

It is against this background that we welcomed the decision of the US Administration to shift the emphasis from the military to the political aspects of the operation in Somalia. Furthermore, we took note of the deadline of 31st March 1994 set for the withdrawal of the US troops from Somalia.

These developments prompted us to examine ways and means of reactivating the peace process in somalia and make significant progress in that direction prior to 31st March 1994. This was the main preoccupation of the Current Chairman, H.E. President Mubarak of Egypt, President Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia as mandated by the Cairo Summit and myself. I have maintained close contacts with both Presidents on this important issue.

Indeed, President Hosni Mubarak invited me to Cairo on October 14th for consultations. While in Cairo, I also had a meeting with both the Current Chairman and the UN Secretary General. I also participated in a meeting convened by President Mubarak with the Secretaries General of the UN, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Conference in attendance. Similarly, I held several discussions with President Meles Zenawi.

On his part, President Meles was active in preparing the ground for the pursuit of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement. He was most helpful in promoting dialogue and a more productive approach to the peace process. As a result of these efforts, a de facto cease-fire was declared between the Aideed faction and UNOSOM.

Following all these developments, I deemed it opportune to despatch a mission to Somalia to assess the situation on the ground. The delegation led by the Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, stayed in somalia from 23 to 28 October. It held discussions with UNOSOM officials including the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Admiral Howe and his Deputy, Ambassador Kouyate. It also met with the Representatives of UN Agencies to discuss the humanitarian situation in Somalia. The delegation further held discussions with Mr. Ali Mahdi and the

Group of 12 Factions. It travelled to Kismayu where it met with General Gabio and General Morgan, Leaders of SPM as well as community leaders including Sultan Sowkor. The delegation also went to Hargessa and held discussions with Mr. Egal Mohamed and his colleagues. Finally the delegation was able to meet and hold lengthy discussions with General Aideed in Mogadishu

The purpose of the mission was to establish direct contact with the Somali factions and to express OAU's concern and keen interest in the restoration of peace, security and stability in Somalia. In all its discussions, the OAU delegation strove to pinpoint the obstacles inhibiting the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, and to obtain the views of the various factions as to how to reactivate the peace process along the same lines as those initiated by President Meles on behalf of OAU.

Following the report of the OAU delegation, I am encouraged by the fact that all the Somali factions continue to subscribe to the Addis Ababa Agreement which therefore stands as the framework for a peaceful resolution of the Somali problem. However, deep suspicions and differences over the modalities for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement still prevail between the two main groups. This clearly indicates that considerable political work still has to be done, before we can envisage the possibility of summoning the factions around the negotiating table. It is our hope that the forthcoming Humanitarian Conference to be held here on 29th November, will be an opportunity for meaningful consultations on how best to proceed towards the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement for peace and national reconciliation. In this connection we welcome the decision adopted on 16th November, 1993 by the UN Security Council which, inter alia, set up an independent Commission of Enquiry on the incident of 5th June.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by referring to the situation in Burundi.

I travelled to Bujumbura accompanied by Ambassador Said Refaat, the Representative of the Current Chairman on the 30th of October subsequent to the Kigali Summit at which leaders of Zaire, Rwanda and Tanzania had expressed their readiness to assist in restoring normalcy and constitutional rule in Burundi and called for the establishment of an International Force for Stabilization and confidence Building in that count

During our visit, I had extensive discussions with both the Government and the Army Command on the situation in the country and particularly on what it is that the OAU could do to help in bringing an end to the inter-communal killings (which were then still going on), to restore stability and confidence and move towards the re-establishment of constitutional rule in the country. I left Bujumbura encouraged by the general disposition of both

parties to find a speedy resolution to the political crisis given the very trying circumstances which the country had been plunged into following the failed coup attempt of the 21st October.

Upon my return, I despatched Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, the Ambassador of Senegal to Ethiopia its Permanent Representative to the OAU, to Burundi as my Special Envoy to follow-up on my discussions with both the Government and the Army Command, and to elaborate with them, in concrete terms, the kind of action and assistance expected of the OAU. Ambassador Fall took advantage of his eight-day stay in Bujumbura to consult with a broad spectrum of the other political forces in the country including political parties, civic societies and religious institutions. Invariably, like both the Government and the Army Command, these other forces expressed the urgent desire to find a speedy settlement which would enable the country to revert to constitutional rule, and for the people to begin the process of national reconciliation and healing.

These varied and wide-ranging consultations held by my Special Envoy resulted in an agreement with both the Government and Army Command on and international presence in the form of a mission of Protection and Observation for the re-establishment of confidence in Burundi. The mission will have as a primary objective the protection of political leaders and the restoration of confidence so that the process of returning to constitutional rule can be facilitated. The mission, consisting of civilian and military personnel numbering about two hundred, and drawn from African countries is expected to stay in Burundi for a period of three to six months.

Since then the Burundi Government has communicated to me through its Prime Minister, conveying its formal agreement to the mission as well as conveying its readiness to cooperate with the OAU in the discharge of this function. In the meantime, I had communicated with the UN Secretary General informing him and through him the Security Council of the Agreement reached as and the disposition of the OAU to contribute to the setting up of the mission in Burundi. In the same communication, I related to him the resource constraint which the OAU faces and thus expressed the hope that the international community would respond to this urgent need with the requisite resources. I have requested the African Group in New York to pursue the matter with the Security Council. Parallel to this, I have also conveyed the same message to the Permanent Members of the Security Council through their Ambassadors based here in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Chairman,

While we pursue efforts through the United Nations, it is important that Africa is seen to be taking seriously the challenge of helping the people of Burundi regain their feet. We should show in concrete terms that we are ready to come to the assistance of our brothers and sisters, if we are to inspire others to help. For

if we fail to stand up and fight for what is right, to help ourselves in time of dire need, we cannot expect the world to take us seriously as a people and a continent resolved to take the mantle of leadership. To this end, it is my firm view that the OAU should proceed urgently to establish that mission of Protection and Observation for the restoration of confidence in Burundi. Consequently, it is my confident hope that the Central Organ will at this session take a firm decision in that direction.

Whether it is in Burundi or elsewhere, Africa is now called upon to seize the initiative. If the experience in Rwanda has taught us anything at all is that we can do it, if we have the perseverance, the determination and the necessary political will. In a world getting more and more inward-looking, Africa cannot realistically expect others to be more concerned about her problems. Europe is looking to Europe, America to America, Asia to Asia. It is time, we took the business of looking to ourselves first seriously. African problems can realistically only be solved by Africans themselves. International solidarity can only complement our efforts. We may lack resources, and we should not hesitate to seek help, but let us provide the leadership. The mechanism we have established gives us the framework to exercise that leadership. As we meet in this historic first Ministerial meeting of the Central Organ, let us resolve to usher in a new era in Africa of putting Africa first in our efforts at resolving our conflicts.