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**UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**



**MEETING OF MINISTERS OF THE SEVENTEENTH  
ORDINARY SESSION OF THE OAU LABOUR COMMISSION**

**Statement**

**by**

**Layashi YAKER  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General,  
Executive Secretary of the  
Economic Commission for Africa**

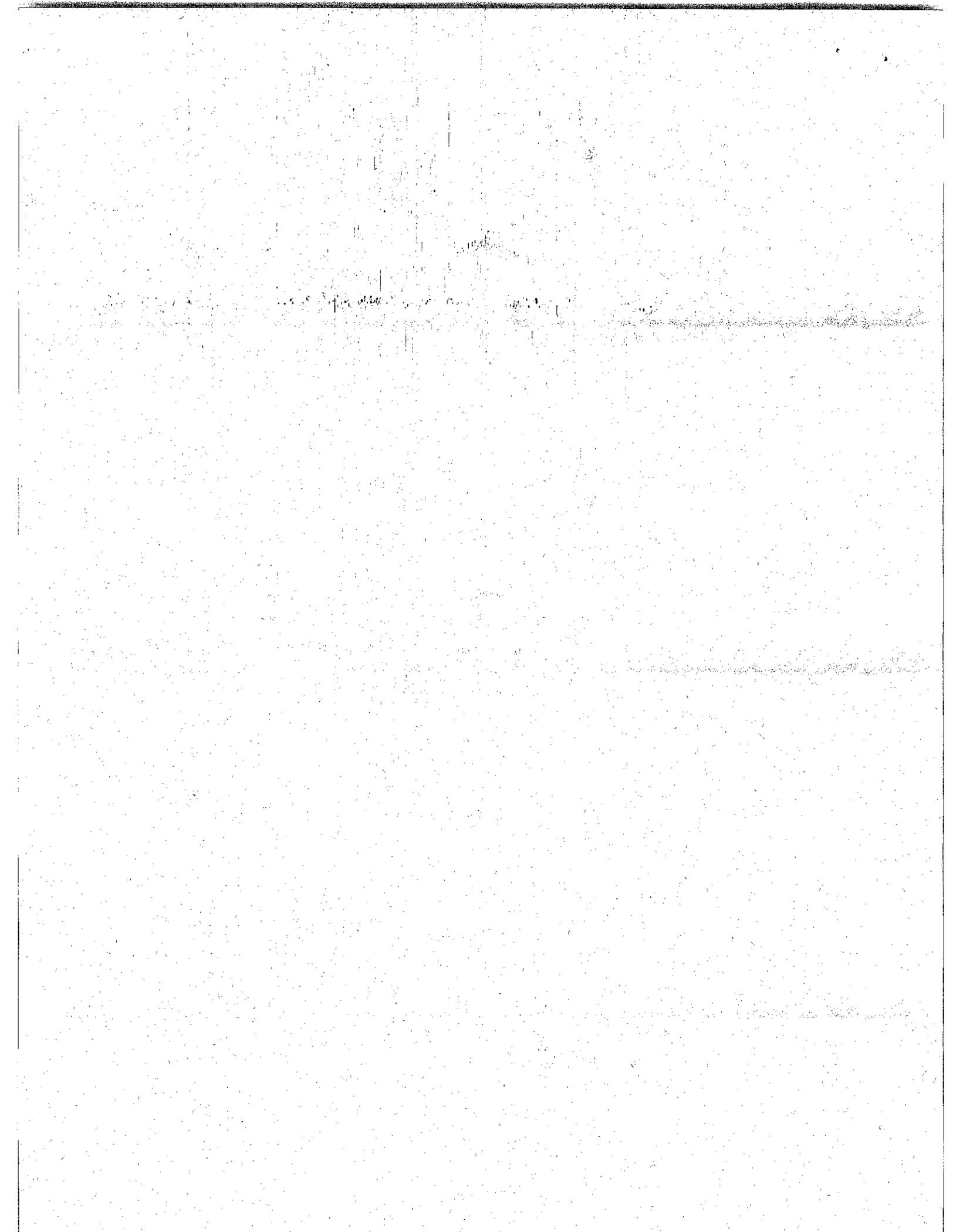
**Addis Ababa, 23 April 1994**

Your Excellency Mr. Tamirat Layne, Prime Minister of the  
Transitional Government of Ethiopia,  
Your Excellency Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the  
Organization of African Unity,  
Mrs. Mary Chinery Hesse, Deputy Director-General of the  
International Labour Office,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Your Excellencies, the Ambassadors,  
Distinguished Participants and Observers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset, Mr. Chairman, to join you and my brother Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim in warmly welcoming H.E. Ato Tamirat Layne, Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia who despite his busy schedule has agreed to grace this occasion with his personal presence and making the opening statement. Allow me also to add my voice to that of my brother Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim and welcome you all most heartily to Africa Hall and to wish you a pleasant stay in this hospitable capital city of Africa, Addis Ababa.

Your meeting is taking place at a time when the African economies and people are facing greater difficulties and uncertainties and are also having to contend with mounting challenges, and these are reflected in the agenda before you. It is not my intention to refer to these developments and challenges in much detail, for I have had other opportunities to do so, such as in my End-of-Year Statement in which I gave an assessment of the performance of the African economies in 1993 and prospects for 1994. Suffice it to say here that the performance of the African economies in recent years has not given cause for optimism and also that human conditions on the continent have further deteriorated.

These developments have been taking place at a time when Africa is confronted with stiff competition - from many developing countries and even the former Soviet Union and East European countries - in the fields of trade and finance and met with a continuously deteriorating external environment for its development. These trends dictate that Africa must accelerate the pace of growth and development on a sustained and environmentally



sustainable basis, give top priority to the objective of sustained improvements in human conditions and invest in human capital to ensure that the competitive capacity of the continent would be brought up to international standards.

The human and social dimensions of these approaches have been comprehensively articulated in the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa - representing Africa's collective views on and contribution to the World Summit for Social Development - which has already been endorsed by your meeting of experts. The draft African Common Position had been prepared jointly by the UNECA and OAU secretariats and was subsequently adopted, in January 1994, by the First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Human Development. Following that, it became an official document of the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development and was greatly appreciated by the Committee. I would like to commend the African Common Position for your endorsement so that it may also be adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government next June in Tunis. The African Common Position would allow Africa to put up its case forcefully and speak with one voice at the World Summit for Social Development. It is my sincere hope that African countries will participate actively in the preparatory activities leading to this important global gathering as well as the Summit itself.

After a careful analysis of the prevailing human and social conditions, the African Common Position elaborates actionable agenda for sustainable human development built around the strategic objectives of poverty alleviation, productive employment and income generation, social integration, peace and political stability, democratization and popular participation in development.

African countries need to implement this actionable agenda in a dedicated and urgent manner. Without this, and unless such human-centred approaches to development are combined with serious efforts to enhance productivity, diversify production and exports, inculcate a work culture and ethic that promotes competitiveness

and entrepreneurship and strengthen regional and subregional economic co-operation and integration, Africa will not be able to shake off the legacy of its economic stagnation and worsening human conditions.

These concerns must be at the centre of your deliberations. The unique tripartite character of your forum provides you with a rare opportunity to give practical expression - reflecting the three dimensions of your social partnership - to a sorely needed new image of an Africa which is resilient, productive and competitive.

Mr. Chairman,  
Honourable Prime Minister,  
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding my statement, I would like to express my satisfaction with the close collaboration between the UNECA and OAU secretariats in the preparation of this meeting. In addition to the African Common Position - which I referred to earlier on, two other documents before you, namely, the reports of the Secretary-General on the International Year of the Family and the Regional Conference on Youth - report on activities that had been jointly organized and initiated by UNECA and OAU. Similarly, UNECA has been closely co-operating with the ILO and OATUU secretariats within the framework of our common concerns.

Such co-operation is indispensable for the harmonization of efforts and the avoidance of costly and unnecessary duplication of activities. Let me assure you of my determination to pursue these objectives not only as related to the work of your Commission, but also beyond that to embrace the totality of the activities of UNECA and OAU. Perhaps, the imperative of the need for such greater co-ordination, rationalization and harmonization of efforts cannot be put to a more challenging test than the implementation of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (AEC), and a progress report on the implementation of the Treaty is part of your

agenda. My distinguished colleagues - the Secretary-General of the OAU and the President of the ADB - and I have already established a joint OAU/ECA/ADB secretariat to ensure the effective co-ordination of the activities and initiatives of our three continental organizations in the best interest of our common membership of African countries. We are determined to further strengthen this secretariat and to make it more effective, particularly as related to the co-ordinated implementation of the Treaty.

Let me wish you successful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.