

OPENING STATEMENT

by

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at the

SECOND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE
ON SOMALIA

Africa Hall, Addis Ababa
15-20 March 1993

Your Excellency Ato Meles Zenawi, President of the
Transitional Government of Ethiopia,
Distinguished Somali Leaders,
Ambassador Lansana Kouyate, Deputy Special Representative of the
Secretary-General for Somalia,
Your Excellency Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General
of the OAU,
Distinguished Chairman of the Standing Committee of the
Countries of the Horn of Africa,
Distinguished Representatives of the League of Arab States,
Organization of Islamic Conference, and the Non-Aligned
Movement,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, I am very pleased to welcome you all again to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa at the opening of the Second National Reconciliation Conference for Somalia.

Let me start by expressing my deep and sincere appreciation to H.E. President Meles Zenawi for the personal interest he has taken in our collective effort to find a lasting solution to the tragedy that has befallen our brothers and sisters in Somalia. I am also very grateful to his excellency the president for the kind support he has so willingly provided to the preparation of both the last meeting and the present one.

To our brothers and sisters from Somalia, I extend to you our warm welcome once more to Africa Hall. Your increased presence in this Second National Reconciliation Conference is a clear indication of the confidence you have placed in our on-going collective efforts to play a catalytical role in lifting Somalia from the ruins in which it now lies and elevating the Somali people to a new platform of peace, prosperity and dignity.

All of us gathered here, and indeed the international community at large, look ahead to the coming days of your conference with a great sense of expectation. An expectation that you, the distinguished Somali leaders, would finally put the tragic years of the divisiveness, conflict and suffering of the Somali nation behind you and agree, at this conference, on the process, actions and modalities which would bring national cohesion to your country.

When we met here last January at the initiative of the Secretary-General Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali to search for lasting peace and stability in Somalia, it was no longer merely a gathering of concerned outsiders. The January First Conference was historic in itself, especially for the United Nations. It was one of the few occasions when representatives of a country embroiled in civil war sat together under the Chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the United Nations himself to seek ways to address the plight of their people.

The Third Coordinating Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance to Somalia which just concluded successfully on March 13, 1993, benefited tremendously from the process set in motion by the Secretary-General Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali last January. Firstly, the 1993 Relief and Rehabilitation Programme was conceived and elaborated in Somalia itself. There can be no doubt that UNITAF forces which now cover approximately 40 % of the country, in succeeding in enabling relief supplies to reach the most affected areas, resulting in a significant reduction in deaths and malnutrition levels, have paved the way for this achievement. Secondly, a large number of Somalis were actively involved in the identification of the priority sectors. Thirdly, the meeting had the privilege and benefit of the participation of 190 Somalis, representing political groupings, community leaders, women's organizations, and national NGOs. The moving interventions of the Somali women will not be

forgotten; their cry of anguish and pain will remain with us as a remainder of our short-comings; in the face of the cruelty they and their children have been subjected to, their strength and determination must be sources of inspiration to all of us. Fourthly, it has now been unequivocally recognized that representatives of all sectors of Somali society must play a direct role in the National Reconciliation and Reconstruction Process. Fifthly, in spite of the competing demands on scarce resources by the increasing number of complex emergencies around the globe, the response of donors to the 1993 relief and rehabilitation programme for Somalia was very positive with an announcement of pledges amounting to a total of more than 130 million US dollars.

Not many of us thought that these encouraging development could come about so soon when we gathered here last January. And yet today, many of you Somalis present at this Conference are joining the process which the Secretary-General of the United Nations Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali set in motion on January 4th, 1993 for the attainment of peace and stability in Somalia.

Thus, the international community has shown considerable solidarity with the people of Somalia. It has been unwilling to stand by and see a people disappear and become history. The indications are that there is still considerable international good-will towards the people of Somalia. There is, however, no guarantee that this good-will continue to remain at its present level given the large number of emerging "trouble spots" throughout Africa and the world of which we are painfully aware. Already, during the third coordinating meeting on humanitarian Assistance to Somalia, some donors were already constrained from making further concrete pledges by their desire to first see more progress in the areas of security, reconciliation, and Somali participation. The time has now come for the Somali

people, traditional leaders, intellectuals and the various groups and organizations in the country to take immediate and practical steps to create the necessary conditions and atmosphere to enable their country to successfully pass through the transition from relief to rehabilitation.

In addition, we must stress that, meaningful and substantial rehabilitation programmes can be effective and sustainable, and offer a better hope of maximizing resources, and enable a solid foundation for future development and prosperity, only and only if peace and security exist.

I am hopeful that this Second National Reconciliation Conference will pave the way for us to now start moving from relief to rehabilitation in Somalia. The achievement of this goal will however depend on your attitude Somali brothers and sisters. The time has come for you to forget and forgive rather than recall and seek revenge, to embrace and forge ahead, rather than fear and mistrust, to look ahead while learning from the past rather than look behind and miss the opportunities of the future. Only you can determine that the time has come to join hands to achieve security and peace, to rehabilitate and reconstruct your country. I am hopeful that you will take up this challenge for the interest of Somalia, for the interest of the Horn of Africa, for the interest of Africa, for the interest of the world.

This is a challenge for you, brothers and sisters, but a challenge you can face, a challenge you must face successfully. All Somalis, men and women, politicians and professionals, elders and other community members, must shoulder the heavy responsibility of working together to achieve security and peace. It is up to you, brothers and sisters Somalis, to work together to solve your problems and rebuild your country. To repeat the appeal made to Somalis by the distinguished

representative of Italy during the Third Coordinating Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia, "Help the International Community to help you".

Before concluding, you[✓] Excellencies, Distinguished participants, let me extend a warm welcome to the new team leading the transition from UNOSOM I to UNOSOM II: Admiral Howe the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Somalia, Ambassador Lansana Kouyate, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Somalia, and Mr. Hugh Cholmondeley, the new Coordinator for Relief and Rehabilitation. They have our full and committed support for their challenging but noble mission.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished participants,

In conclusion, one cannot but look at the days ahead of us with optimism. The very presence of the Somali leaders at this conference is a no small achievement, which should augur well for the tasks that need to be dealt with. There is a moment to be captured, and should be captured. The return of peace, stability and national unity to Somalia are certainly lofty objectives in their own rights. Yet, they are essential prerequisites for the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development tasks that must ensue.

It is my sincere hope that this Second National Reconciliation Conference will mark the beginning of a new Somalia, a Somalia whose collective undivided attention is focused on reconstruction and long-term development founded on lasting peace and security.

It remains for me to wish you all the best in your deliberations and to assure you of UNECA's unwavering support

for the tasks of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development of Somalia that lay ahead.

On behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, I am indeed, once more, honoured to welcome you all to this most important meeting. I look forward to very positive and fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.