

**Statement**

**By**

**H.E Ato Seyoum Mesfin,**

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic**

**Republic of Ethiopia,**

**On the Occasion of his being awarded an Honorary**

**Doctorate Degree of Letters by the Great Lakes University**

**of Kisumu**

**3 May 2010**

**Kisumu, Kenya**

**Excellencies, Ministers, Provincial Commissioner and Senior  
Government Officials of the Republic of Kenya,**

**Hon. Chancellor, Chairman of the Governing Council and Vice  
Chancellor,**

**Honourable Members of the Senate and the University Council of  
the Great Lakes University of Kisumu,**

**Invited Guests,**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour for me to be present here on this auspicious occasion at your University to receive an Honorary Doctorate Degree of Letters. I should like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the Senate and University Council for this recognition and for the decision to confer on me this honour. I consider this a singular honour not only to me, but even more, to my country, which has given me the honour and privilege to be in its service at this high level of responsibility. I view this initiative by the Great Lakes University of Kisumu, as a source of encouragement for the IGAD region and a recognition of the effort we have been making together for peace and stability in our sub-region.

I should also pay tribute to your esteemed University for its dedicated effort in the service of the people of Africa, particularly in the social areas of community health and development. I should also like to express my pleasure and honour to be in the company of Mama Sarah Obama, Senator Larry Womble of USA, and Prof. Brimmy Olaghere who are present here today as a co-recipient of an award by the University.

As I indicated in my acceptance letter to Professor Dan Kaseje, Vice-Chancellor of the University, all that we have done for peace and stability in our sub-region has been the result of a collective effort of the countries of IGAD, civil society, and the peoples of our sub-region, as a whole.

I should underline here one very important matter: We in the IGAD region, despite the continuing image of our sub-region as an area of instability, have been far more pro-active, amidst lack of effective co-operation from others including from the World Organization, than members of other regions in perhaps virtually all other parts of the world. We need no more evidence for this than the situation in Somalia where the world body is still waiting for us to create peace so that it would deploy peace support mission to protect that peace we create. Rather ironic, but true. This says much, among other things, about how far the UN has to go to be, and been seen to be, committed to the principle of universalism without which the organization would hardly be able to maintain its credibility as belonging to all in equal terms.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Invited guests,**

This event today – your generous decision to recognize us — is taking place at a very critical period in the history of our continent, and that of our sub-region. In this regard, in terms of general trends in the economic area, no doubt, we in Africa, have been doing much better than ten or twenty year ago; and this despite the world-wide economic dislocation since the second half of 2008. What the past few years have shown is that Africa, though not yet out of the woods completely, can no longer be viewed as of only marginal importance to the world.

Africa indeed matters. The indications are, this, in fact, appears to be the likely trend even more, in the years ahead. What this means is that Africa's future is far from being bleak and there is no reason why the young generation of Africans should not look to the future, with confidence.

But all this does not mean that we have been sufficiently effective, ready and efficient in making use of all the opportunities we have had over the past decade or so to ensure rapid economic development in Africa which is a sine qua non for maintaining our viability as nations, and as peoples. In this connection, the major critical impediment to the achievement of our objectives in the economic area is related to our failure to establish durable and sustainable peace, security and stability in our continent, perhaps most particularly, in our sub region. Obviously, the possibility for durable peace will always be precarious in a situation of poverty. In that sense, no society that has failed to give hope to its youth about the future, can ever hope to ensure sustainable and durable stability. But it is wrong to believe that poverty is synonymous with anarchy, or that a modicum of peace and stability is beyond the grasp of countries at our stage of development. While lack of any progress towards the improvement of the social conditions of our peoples for an extended period of time, may be pregnant with danger, it is sheer folly to believe that we cannot have sufficient level of peace and stability that would allow economic development to proceed even while we are still fighting poverty. What matters the most in this regard is that the fight be an earnest fight — a fight against poverty which has the widest popular participation, and support.

It is on the basis of the conviction that peace and stability is critical for the economic and social development of our sub-region — developments that are again critical for maintaining our viability as peoples - that we in Ethiopia, together with our partners in the IGAD region, have been doing our level best for peace in Somalia and the Sudan. As far as my own country Ethiopia is concerned, I must underline here that our activity in this area has not been limited strictly to the Horn of Africa. I am pleased this has indeed been recognized by the Great Lakes University and our attachment to the Great lakes region is thereby underlined and is taken note of.

It should be recalled that it was in fact when we were still at the fledging phase of our Administration, after the overthrow of the military dictatorship in Ethiopia in 1991, that we decided to send in 1994 Ethiopian peace-keepers to Rwanda at a time of great tragedy in that country. In subsequent years, Ethiopian peace-keepers have been deployed to Burundi, Liberia and Sudan. These commitments that we have made were not the result of isolated decisions made in haphazard manner. These commitments have been the expression of a vision which attaches critical importance to peace as a condition for the restoration of the African renaissance and our viability as peoples which can be achieved only through economic development. In other words, there has always been the referred to overarching rationale that ties these various commitments we have made for peace in our continent.

In this regard, no conflict situation in our sub-region has been as difficult to sort out as the conflict in Somalia has been. By the same token, though what is usually talked about, is the intractability of the problem in that country, no conflict in any part of the world has been as neglected by the international community as that conflict has been.

Despite appearances to the contrary, the conflict in Somalia continues to be one to which the UN has given the least priority.

What are the chances now of making real progress toward peace and national reconciliation in Somalia? This is a question we need to pose, not only because the problem of Somalia has been with us for too long, and that the more it stays with us the more dangerous the implications would be, but also because the African Union has declared the year 2010, the Year of Peace in Africa. This same consideration reminds us also of the other major concern we have in our sub-region whose careful handling is made imperative in the interest of peace and stability, not only in the Horn of Africa, but also in the Great Lakes Region and Central Africa as a whole, and even beyond. I am referring here to the situation in Sudan, most particularly to the relationship between the South and the North in the context of which the Referendum which is scheduled for January 2011 is critical, both for the future of Sudan and for peace and stability in our sub-region and beyond. I would like to say a few things about the challenges the people of the Sudan face between now and the Referendum, but before I do so let me add one or two remarks to what I have already said on Somalia.

The crisis in Somalia can no longer strictly speaking be viewed as a conflict among Somalis only. Over the last few years, the role of external extremist forces and their supporters has become so critical in that country that to characterize the conflict as only intra-Somali would amount to burying our heads in the sand.

Our sub-region, through our regional organization, IGAD, together with the AU, has done what it could for peace in Somalia. But we haven't had much to show for in that country.

Whatever we might have done, has just not been sufficient to help Somalia come out of the nightmare the country faces. The reason is not difficult to fathom. Putting aside the responsibility of Somalis for all this, one can not ignore how much Somalia has been ignored by the international community; this despite the protestation to the contrary. We have repeatedly said that there is greater coordination among those external forces assisting extremism in Somalia than there is among those of us within the international community who profess support to the internationally recognized Transitional Government of Somalia. As a result, it is becoming more and more difficult to see a light at the end of the tunnel in Somalia.

This does not mean that we should give up hope in Somalia in so far as the prospect of peace and national reconciliation is concerned. There is no alternative to doing more for peace in that country, because the alternative would be dire and would amount to allowing the extremists, most particularly the foreign ones, to prevail. What it does mean is that Somalia is likely to continue to be an exception to the promise that the AU has made to make this year a Year of Peace in Africa. This is no fault of the African Union, the only organization that has taken the risk of deploying a peace support mission in Somalia. One can imagine what might already have happened in Mogadishu without AMISOM. We should thus pay tribute to Uganda and Burundi for carrying the burden in Mogadishu.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In terms of the broader implications of the failure of a peace process and of an agreement between two parties, there are few instances that would compare with the peace process in the Sudan and the CPA. Sudan is not simply a Horn of Africa country. Sudan is also part of Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region. Accordingly, the failure of the peace process, in the Sudan, God forbid, if it were to happen, would have grave implications that would reverberate throughout these regions, and even beyond. There is just no alternative to doing what we must to encourage the two parties to proceed in good faith toward the full implementation of the CPA. The two parties hold the key to sustainable peace and stability in the Sudan. No other party does; and we have no doubt about the capacity of both parties to ensure the realization of that noble goal. But they have to put their heads together and proceed towards the Referendum, the success of which very much depends on how successfully they would have discussed, in a win-win spirit, the post Referendum situation, long before the holding of Referendum itself.

It is indisputable that the IGAD region should have been even more proactive for peace in the Sudan and to help expedite the implementation of the CPA. But it would be unfair to see IGAD as having been a mere spectator in the process of the negotiations for peace in the Sudan. It is a matter of historical record that the principles that underpin the CPA were initially outlined by IGAD in the Declaration of Principles that it had proposed to the two parties and was accepted at the time by both. Moreover, the fact that the CPA was signed in Kenya was not accidental, for it highlighted the key role that Kenya has played for peace in the Sudan, including by leading the effort we have been making within IGAD towards the realization of this objective.

The recent elections in the Sudan, including in the South, and the results achieved, have indeed created much stronger basis for the two parties to enhance their cooperation as they approach the Referendum. The IGAD region has a clear perspective on what it needs to do to help the two parties overcome the immense challenge they are facing as they go towards the Referendum. We are determined in this regard to assist the effort being made by the High-level Implementation panel, led by former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, which has been charged by the AU to lead the African effort for the effective implementation of the CPA. As I have already indicated, however, it is the two parties that can really make the difference and contribute in a real way to making this year a real Year of Peace in Africa.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I began my remarks today by stressing how peace and stability is so critical for the major challenge we face in the economic area, a challenge which is related to the need to ensure our viability as a people and as Africans. This is a prospect whose possibility is just beginning to be noticed by others. One thing, we can say in full confidence is this—Africa is no longer ignored and is no longer treated as no more than of a mere marginal importance to the world. This is not to claim that Africa is already out of the woods. We are not. But what it means is that pessimism about Africa's future has no basis at all. Our continent indeed has a bright future. But the realization of that requires effort, individually and collectively, on the part of our nations. Putting aside what we have been doing individually, what we have begun to do jointly, among some of our countries lately, have indeed been encouraging. The countries of the region have now decided to embark on major projects to bring their countries together.

This has been particularly notable in the area of infrastructural development. It would not be too long before, for instance, Ethiopia would be connected by rail and electricity with the Sudan and Kenya; before all these countries Ethiopia and Djibouti would have their hydropower grid connected and their linkages through roads are enhanced and upgraded. This is a strategy to which Ethiopia accords the highest priority.

In all these activities, we need partners who would be prepared to engage us on the basis of mutual respect and commitment to advancing mutual advantages. All those who are prepared to contribute to the economic revival of our sub-region should be regarded as our friends, for we have no greater priorities as nations than ensuring our very viability as peoples, and as Africans. But again, we can only be taken seriously by potential partners when we are seen to be worthy of the partnership from which they would also wish to draw benefits. This can happen only when we can manage to have acceptable level of peace and stability in our sub-region and a practice of governance which is truly representative, democratic and inclusive. That is why we should spare no effort to ensure our sub-region becomes peaceful and stable as well as committed to democratic values. In Ethiopia we take our democratic process as a matter of first priority which we have no doubt will be further deepened by the election we are preparing for and will be taking place in about three weeks.

Let me conclude by reiterating my deep appreciation for the honour bestowed on me by this great University.

I Thank You