

OPENING REMARKS BY HON. JOAB OMINO, ASSISTANT MINISTER, FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS DURING THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION, GIGIRI, NAIROBI, JUNE, 23RD 2003.

AMBASSADOR IBRAHIMA FALL,

SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR THE GREAT LAKES REGION,

MR. KELI WALUBITA,
SPECIAL ENVOY AFRICAN UNION

EXCELLENCIES,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO WELCOME YOU TO THIS MEETING.

MAY I THANK THE *UNITED NATIONS* SECRETARY GENERAL, MR. KOFI ANNAN, FOR CONVENING THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE PEACE, SECURITY, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION.

THE MEETING IS INDEED OPPORTUNE. IT COMES AT A TIME WHEN THE SUB-REGION IS IN DIRE NEED FOR LASTING SOLUTIONS TO THE ONGOING CONFLICTS IN THE SUB-REGION. THE CRISIS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION POSES A GRAVE THREAT TO PEACE, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN OUR REGION.

THE *UNITED NATIONS* CONCEPT PAPER UNDERLINES THE FACT THAT THE PRECARIOUS SITUATION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION IS THE RESULT OF INTERCONNECTED PROBLEMS. THEY INCLUDE, BAD GOVERNANCE, LACK OF DEMOCRACY, MONOPOLISATION OF POLITICAL POWER, A POLICY OF EXCLUSION, WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION, NEPOTISM, VIOLATION OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND POVERTY. THIS HAS LED TO CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AND INSTABILITY IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT WAR USUALLY BREAKS OUT AFTER A PERIOD OF GRADUAL DETERIORATION. PREVENTION HAS THE BEST PROSPECTS OF SUCCESS IF UNDERTAKEN AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE STAGE. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, DECISIONS ARE TAKEN AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR DUE TO THE STRONG FORCES AT WORK WHICH OBSTRUCT EARLY ACTION.

THE END OF THE COLD WAR OPENED UP NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE SUPPORT BUT ALSO CREATED

NEW THREATS AND RISKS TO PEACE AND SECURITY. ALTHOUGH MANY LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNT ABOUT PEACE SUPPORT OVER THE YEARS, THE LESSONS HAVE NOT BEEN APPLIED IN PRACTICE. THE LIMITED SUCCESS HAS LED TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS NEED TO COME UP WITH IMPROVED PEACE INSTRUMENTS TO PROMOTE PEACE SUPPORT, RESEARCH ON CONFLICTS, IMPROVED TRAINING, AND ALLOCATION OF ADEQUATE RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF EFFORTS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE EFFECT OF GLOBALISATION ON REGIONAL INTERESTS. GLOBALISATION MEANS THAT ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, USUALLY CONSIDERED TO BE DOMESTIC CONCERNS HAVE FAR REACHING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT FROM A SECURITY POINT OF VIEW. AT THE SAME TIME, THE RESULTS OF GLOBALISATION, INTEGRATION AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS ALSO OFFER THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACHIEVING PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT. OUR MEETING IS CHARGED WITH THE TASK OF ACTUALISING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION TO ENSURE THAT OUR NATIONS BENEFIT FROM GLOBALISATION. HENCE UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMS OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION IS CRITICAL IF WE ARE TO SUCCEED.

I AM CONVINCED GLOBAL CO-OPERATION TO SUSTAIN PEACE IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION IS NECESSARY AND SHOULD INCLUDE, POVERTY ERADICATION, PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY, REGIONAL SUPPORT OF PEACE EFFORTS AND PREVENTION OF ARMED CONFLICTS AND DISARMAMENT. THE UN AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY COULD *HELP* US ADDRESS THESE ISSUES.

ENDING POVERTY IS IMPERATIVE. LARGE ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES TEND TO CREATE FRICTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND EVEN COUNTRIES. FURTHERMORE, MARGINALISATION IS A RECIPE FOR CONFLICTS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION PLAY A MUCH GREATER ROLE IN THE LONG-TERM PREVENTION OF CONFLICTS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

VIOLENCE BREEDS VIOLENCE AND SHOULD HAVE NO PLACE IN OUR COUNTRIES. ENSURING THAT DEMOCRACY TAKES ROOT IN OUR REGION WOULD HELP TO PREVENT CONFLICTS AND CONSEQUENTLY, THE PROLIFERATION OF ILLICIT SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS. WHILE ADDRESSING THE CRISIS WE NEED TO FOCUS ON PRACTICAL AND CONCRETE MEASURES, SUCH AS, COLLECTION, SAFE STORAGE AND DESTRUCTION OF ARMS.

THE PEOPLE OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION NEED TO BUILD POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO THE CONFLICTS. IT IS TIME THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY GENUINELY SUPPORTED THE REGION BY HELPING TO LOOK FOR WORKABLE SOLUTIONS, THAT ARE SUSTAINABLE IN THE LONG TERM. CO-OPERATION WITH REGIONAL ACTORS IS CRUCIAL, ALTHOUGH COMPLEX ESPECIALLY IN TODAY'S GROWING GREY ZONE OF CONFLICTS – DOMESTIC IN ORIGIN, BUT INTERNATIONAL IN IMPACT.

IT IS VITAL THAT A MULTIFACETED APPROACH IS ADOPTED TO REVIEW THE ROOT CAUSES AND NATURE OF THE CRISIS, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT BOTH THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS. THE UN SHOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND PROMOTE DEMOCRACY AROUND THE WORLD.

ALLOW ME TO SHARE WITH YOU MY REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE GOVERNMENTS, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS CAN PLAY IN PROMOTING PEACE-BUILDING IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION. IT IS CLEAR THAT LASTING PEACE CANNOT BE IMPOSED FROM OUTSIDE OUR REGION. RECONCILIATION MUST GROW FROM WITHIN. I BELIEVE IMPROVING GOVERNANCE AND CREATING A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE BROADER PARTICIPATION OF OUR CITIZENS IN DEVELOPMENT WILL BE KEY TO OUR SUCCESS.

CONFLICT PREVENTION IS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT FOR EACH AND EVERYONE OF US INCLUDING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. THERE IS NEED TO ADDRESS THE REPATRIATION AND RE-INTEGRATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS, SUPPORT FOR REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION, RE-EDUCATION AND DEMOBILISATION OF SOLDIERS. PEACE BUILDING REQUIRES INVESTIGATING PAST VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY EXISTS. NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES MUST BE STRENGTHENED.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

FINALLY, THE PROPOSED CONFERENCE WILL PROVIDE A FORUM AND A PROCESS TO ADDRESS THE CRISIS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION. MAY I REAFFIRM MY GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING ASSISTANCE, HOWEVER MODEST THAT WOULD ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF THIS ENDEAVOUR.