

OPENING REMARK

BY

**H.E. ATO SEYOUM MESFIN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF THE F.D.R.E. AND CURRENT CHAIR OF IGAD,**

ON

**THE OCCASION OF THE SPECIAL 33RD EXTRA-ORDINARY
SESSION OF THE IGAD COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

ON

**THE SECURITY AND POLITICAL SITUATION
IN SOMALIA**

20TH MAY 2009

ADDIS ABABA

Excellencies Ministers and Colleagues

**H.E. Mr. Jean Ping,
Chairperson of the AU Commission,**

**H.E. Eng. Mahboub M. Maalim,
Executive Secretary of IGAD**

**H.E. Ambassador Raffaelli de Lutio
Ambassador of the Republic of Italy and Chair of IGAD
Partner Forum,**

Excellencies Ambassadors and Heads of Mission,

**H.E. Mr. Ahmedou Ould Abdallah,
Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN for
Somalia,**

Dear Delegates,

I thank you all for accepting my invitation and for your presence here today. This Extra-ordinary Council meeting became necessary because of the rapidly changing situation in Somalia for the worse. It is indeed incumbent upon us to take stock of developments over the last weeks and come up with a common approach on how to contribute to the assistance that the new Government in Somalia needs, to address the challenges it is facing currently.

**Excellencies and Colleagues,
Dear Delegates,**

We in IGAD have done all that is necessary, and to the best of our ability, to help our brothers and sisters in Somalia to go beyond the crisis that has engulfed their country for eighteen years. Over the past year or so, we have made all the required efforts to stabilize the situation in the country and to assist the Somalis create a board-based government that would establish durable peace in the country and national reconciliation among the Somalis. We assisted the process leading to the formation of the new government at the

beginning of this year, and have continued to assist it in any way possible since. But of course, no matter how ready we have been, given our limitations, it is only so much that we could do. Most of all, in the absence of the requisite level of co-operation from the international community commensurate with the potential danger in Somalia which was all too visible, the IGAD countries have been reduced to observing the looming danger. We in IGAD are absolutely convinced that the lack of sufficient concern displayed by many while the extremists were given a field day to bask in the support they have been receiving from near and far, would be regretted. It is always more difficult and more complex to reverse a dangerous process, once it is too late.

**Dear Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There are a few crucial points that need to be highlighted in this regard. First, it is very clear that the new government under President Sheik Sherif Sheikh Ahmed has done, under the circumstances, everything it could to bring on board all those Somali groups that were prepared to join the Peace Process. But despite all the efforts it has made in this regard, it could not succeed, and this for obvious reasons. The extremists are just not interested in peace and their agenda has had nothing to do with normalizing the situation in Somalia. Theirs, for which they continue to receive support, both from our region and from outside our region, is a plan that goes beyond Somalia. Moreover, the support they are getting includes support in the form of fighters that come from outside our region and who have absolutely no attachment to the concept of Somalia as a state. The fact that the ongoing struggle in Somalia is not only among Somalis is becoming more apparent today than at any time in the past. This is also recognized in the latest report of the Secretary General of the UN, though the logical conclusion is not drawn from this dangerous

reality. Those involved are not even trying to conceal their identity. Frankly speaking, the chicken is coming home to roost in Somalia. The neglect or the underestimation of the problem Somalia has faced appears to be coming to haunt the international community, with vengeance.

The second point that needs to be stressed is that, with little exaggeration, the international community has let the Government of Somalia down. Until the eve of this latest onslaught by the extremists, the Government was being told that its priority should be to bring on board those same extremists who have shown no inclination for negotiation and whose sole objective has always been removal of the government and even more. Even the United Nations has not been helpful in this regard. The report of the Secretary-General on Somalia which came out on 16 April had four options for the country the last of which provided for the total withdrawal of the UN from Somalia. Paradoxically, this option "D", for which the report said a contingency plan was being prepared, tallied exactly with what the extremists were working for, and were hoping would be realized. It was very clear to the Al-Shabab and others, including to state parties such as Eritrea, that the most the International Community would do, should the new Government of Somalia face difficulty, was to pack up and leave. That was a tragedy which showed that the Government which was supported by the UN and the International Community as a whole, was getting far less committed support than the extremists who were receiving support without any constraint and inhibition from their supporters. Paradoxically, some of their supporters and their sources of funding would like to be seen as peace makers concerning other conflict situations in our region. We all have seen how none of those, including State Members of the UN, who were calling for the overthrow of the new Government and for violence against AMISOM, were even indirectly criticized, let alone condemned. In other words, even in the

political and diplomatic sphere the Government of Shiek Sherief has been bereft of effective support.

Thirdly, Dear Friends, we are now facing a real possibility of the unraveling of the whole situation in Somalia. The past week or so has shown how the new Government of Somalia was being attacked with little support from any source. The promise made in Brussels recently cannot have meaning unless it made a difference when the new Government is facing an existential challenge from those who have no commitment to peace, but rather whose desire is to cause havoc in our sub-region.

**Dear Brothers,
Distinguished Delegates**

We had to meet today because the situation in Somalia calls for our urgent attention. No other group of countries is closer to the problem in Somalia than members of IGAD. Our individual and collective national security interests are engaged in Somalia, all the more so given the objective of those who are set to get rid of a Government recognized by the entire international Community. At no time has our collective voice and joint effort been needed than at Present. This is so because what we see around us is either total confusion or total lack of concern about what is taking place in Somalia. One thing must be emphasized here and that is, the extremists appear to have gained momentum mainly by default. They have indeed little domestic support, as can be seen from their still small number, though they don't have shortage of funds, making clear where their sustenance comes. They appear powerful because the Government is weak, partly because of its own fault but mainly because the support the extremists are getting is not being offset by support that should have been made available to the Government.

It is our hope that there is no confusion now because the extremists are clarifying matters for those who might have had illusions about the possibility of converting the extremists into democrats and the promoters of the rule of law and principles of international law. Their spokesmen and leaders are making it clear that their objectives are not limited to Somalia. The possible lack of concern, of course, does just make sense in light of the piracy off the coast of Somalia, which everyone realizes is not a purely maritime affair. Our task therefore at this meeting is daunting and complex because in the light of the confusion or apparent lack of concern, IGAD cannot be confident that there would be the required coordination and co-operation soon enough and sufficient enough to make a real difference in Somalia. The tragedy is what is required is not all that big.

It is my hope and confidence that at the end of our deliberation we will come out with a common approach which will help us assist Somalia confront the serious challenge the country is facing.

I Thank You