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QUESTION OF THE DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER ITALIAN COLONIES

Telegram dated 30 November 1949 from the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Addis Ababa, 30 November 1949

UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR OF ETHIOPIA, MY AUGUST SOVEREIGN, I HAVE THE HONOUR TO REQUEST YOU TO LAY BEFORE THE PRESENT ASSEMBLY AND TO COMMUNICATE THE FOLLOWING TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS:

"I, HAILE SELASSIE, EMPEROR OF ETHIOPIA, FAITHFUL MEMBER OF THE UNITED NATIONS, FEEL IT TO BE MY DUTY AGAIN TO RAISE MY VOICE IN TRUE HUMILITY AND OUT OF A DEEP SENSE OF OBLIGATION TO MY PEOPLE AND TO THE PRESERVATION OF JUSTICE IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIP. THROUGHOUT MY LIFE I HAVE BEEN SECOND TO NONE IN MY UNSWERVING FAITH AND DEVOTION TO THE IDEAL OF A COMMUNITY OF NATIONS BASED ON EQUITY AND JUSTICE.

I CAN SAY, WITH PERHAPS PARDONABLE PRIDE, THAT I HAVE BEEN THE ONLY SOVEREIGN OF AN INDEPENDENT PEOPLE, IN ITS HOUR OF DESTINY, TO HAVE BEEN PRESENT AT AN ASSEMBLY OF NATIONS IN ORDER TO DEFEND MY MARTYRED NATION AND TO VOICE TO THE WORLD A PROPHECY, PROVED BY SUBSEQUENT HISTORY TO HAVE BEEN ONLY TOO TRUE, OF THE CATASTROPHIC EVENTS WHICH WOULD AND WHICH, IN FACT, DID LEAD TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

THIS COURSE OF HISTORY, I TRUST, NOT ONLY GIVES ME THE RIGHT, BUT ALSO IMPOSES UPON ME THE SACRED DUTY OF AGAIN, AT THIS CRITICAL HOUR OF HISTORY, DRAWING THE ATTENTION OF THE WORLD TO THE INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES OF PREFERRING APPEASEMENT TO JUSTICE.

AN EMINENT AND ARDENT FRENCH PROTAGONIST OF THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SOLIDARITY ONCE SAID THAT IT IS WELL TO REMEMBER THAT THE DEGREE OF DISILLUSIONMENT PRODUCED BY FAILURE TO RESPECT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSALITY OF NATIONS CAN BE MEASURED ONLY BY THE DEGREE OF DEVOTION AND HOPE WHICH ANY NATION HAS PLACED IN SUCH AN IDEAL. CERTAINLY, THE HOPE AND DEVOTION WHICH I AND MY PEOPLE HAVE CONSECRATED TO THAT IDEAL HAVE BEEN LIMITLESS.

THE LESSONS OF PAST AND RECENT HISTORY RELATING TO ETHIOPIA AND TO FORMER ITALIAN SOMALILAND, AND ALL THE ETHNIC AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS

/OF THE PROBLEM

OF THE PROBLEM PRESENTED SO ABLY AND CONVINCINGLY BY MY DELEGATION TO THIS AREOPAGUS OF NATIONS, HAVE FAILED AT THIS TIME TO PERSUADE THE MAJORITY OF THE ASSEMBLY TO GIVE SATISFACTION TO THE JUST CLAIMS OF MY COUNTRY. BY DECISION OF THE ASSEMBLY, ITALY HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH THE ADMINISTRATION OF SOMALILAND AND THROUGH THAT DECISION AGAIN BECOMES A NEIGHBOUR OF ETHIOPIA. WIDE AND INTIMATE EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST, INCLUDING THE RECENT PAST, COMPELS US DEEPLY TO DEPLORE THIS ACTION

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF ITALY, FORCED UPON US, NEVER BROUGHT TO OUR COUNTRY ANYTHING BUT MISFORTUNES AND CALAMITY, AND BECAME THE SOURCE OF THE GREATEST PERILS TO OUR NATIONAL SECURITY. IT WAS FROM NEIGHBOURING TERRITORIES THAT ALL ENCROACHMENTS AND ATTACKS UPON OUR COUNTRY WERE PREPARED AND LAUNCHED, INCLUDING THE FOMENTING OF LOCAL QUARRELS AND INCIDENTS AMONGST NEIGHBOURING POPULATIONS, BY CORRUPTION WITH MONEY AND PROMISES, WITH A VIEW TO ATTRIBUTING LATER TO ETHIOPIA THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUCH TROUBLES, EVIDENCE OF WHICH IS ALREADY COMING TO LIGHT BOTH IN ERITREA AND SOMALILAND.

MAY THIS MESSAGE RECALL THE LESSON OF THE PAST TO THE MEMORY OF ALL MEN OF GOOD WILL. WITH THE DECISION OF THE ASSEMBLY TO FORCE UPON ETHIOPIA THE RETURN OF ITALY TO NEIGHBOURING TERRITORY NOT SEPARATED FROM ETHIOPIA BY DELIMITED FRONTIERS, THIS PERIL WHICH IS THE LESSON OF THE PAST HAS NOW BECOME A CERTAIN, INEVITABLE AND OVERWHELMING DANGER TO MY COUNTRY. HENCE ITALY'S PRESENT MILITARY PREPARATIONS DESTINED FOR SOMALILAND. IN THAT RESPECT, NO ONE IS BETTER FITTED THAN ETHIOPIA TO GIVE A TRUE PICTURE OF THE DANGER THAT WOULD BE CAUSED BY THE PRESENCE OF ITALY IN THE NEIGHBOURING TERRITORY. THE ASSEMBLY, PRESUMING THAT THE NEW ITALY WOULD THINK AND ACT IN A MIRACULOUSLY CHANGED MANNER, HAS, IN MY OPINION, BEEN LABOURING UNDER A DANGEROUS DELUSION. ITALIAN ADMINISTRATION BROUGHT TO SOMALILAND POVERTY, MISERY, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, CORRUPTION AND FAVOURS FOR THE FEW. THESE ARE FACTS CLEARLY STATED IN OFFICIAL RECORDS FOR THE STUDY OF ALL. HUMAN NATURE MUST REMAIN HUMAN NATURE. IT IS THIS CONTINUITY, THIS IMMENSE INERTIA OF PAST AND RECENT HISTORY, WORKING AS AN UNINTERRUPTED FORCE, WHICH GIVES BIRTH TO OUR MISGIVINGS. THE GHOST OF PAST IMPERIALISM, REINCARNATED WITHOUT INTERRUPTION INTO AN ITALIAN TRUSTEESHIP, CASTS A LONG SHADOW OVER THE FUTURE OF SOMALILAND. HOW CAN THE SAME ITALY, WHO DURING SIXTY YEARS OF OCCUPATION OF THE TERRITORY, DID NOTHING TO THE INHABITANTS BUT HER IMPERIALISTIC EXPLOITATION BE EXPECTED TO PREPARE THEM IN TEN YEARS FOR INDEPENDENCE IF INDEPENDENCE IS TO BE TAKEN IN ITS TRUE SENSE THIS COULD BEST BE REALISED BY REUNION

/WITH THE MOTHERLAND,

WITH THE MOTHERLAND, TO WHOM SOMALILAND IS LINKED ETHNICALLY, ECONOMICALLY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY.

WHO KNOWS, WHO CAN TELL, IN THE FANTASTIC PACE WITH WHICH HUMANITY IS NOW RUSHING FORWARD THROUGH NEW PERMUTATIONS OF POWER, WHAT OTHER CONSEQUENCES MAY FOLLOW THIS FATEFUL DECISION? WE DO KNOW THAT THE POPULATION OF SOMALILAND HAS PROTESTED AND IS VIOLENTLY PROTESTING AGAINST A DECISION WHICH WOULD AGAIN SUBJECT THIS PEOPLE TO THEIR FORMER OPPRESSOR. IN THIS CONNEXION, WE CANNOT LET GO UNNOTICED THE FACT OF A VIOLATION OF PRINCIPLE IN THE REFUSAL OF A SUGGESTION TO SEND, AS IN THE CASE OF ERITREA, AN ENQUIRY COMMISSION TO THE FORMER ITALIAN SOMALILAND, WHERE THE INHABITANTS ARE FIRMLY OPPOSED TO THE RETURN OF ITALIAN ADMINISTRATION IN ANY FORM OR MANNER.

IN VOTING FOR THE REIMPOSITION OF ITALY OVER THE TERRITORY OF HER FORMER IMPERIALISTIC EXPLOITS, THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY APPEAR TOO EASILY TO HAVE FORGOTTEN THE LESSONS OF HISTORY IN THEIR DESIRE TO ATTAIN A FACILE AND OPPORTUNIST SETTLEMENT. AS FOR ETHIOPIA, WE CANNOT, SO HELP US GOD, FOR THE SAKE OF OUR NATIONAL SECURITY, FORGET OR CLOSE OUR EYES TO THOSE LESSONS, NOR CAN THAT BE ASKED OF US. WE ARE FIGHTING FOR OUR SACRED RIGHTS, FOR THE RIGHTS OF ETHIOPIA SO BRUTALLY RAVISHED IN THE PAST, AND FOR THE NATURAL RIGHTS OF THOSE, OUR PEOPLES, SEPARATED FROM US BY ACTS OF IMPERIALISM. I NOTE THAT THIS DECISION OF THE ASSEMBLY, IN DENIAL OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF ETHIOPIA TO THE BEMADIR AND OTHER REGIONS OF SOMALILAND, IMPERILS THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF MY COUNTRY.

IT IS A GREAT CONSOLATION TO ME, AND I NOTE WITH SUPREME GRATITUDE, THAT, IN THE COURSE OF THE RECENT DELIBERATIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY ETHIOPIA LOST NO FRIENDS, BUT, ON THE CONTRARY, GAINED MANY LOYAL AND STAUNCH SUPPORTERS OF HER JUST CAUSE. TO THOSE WHO, AS BEFORE, HAVE STOOD BY US IN OUR HOURS OF TRIALS, WE EXTEND OUR DEEPEST AND MOST SINCERE THANKS.

IT IS MY PERVENT HOPE, AS SOVEREIGN OF A FAITHFUL MEMBER STATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, THAT THIS AUGUST ORGAN OF THE WORLD DEMOCRACY WILL, AT LONG LAST, FIND IT POSSIBLE TO CORRECT AND TO COMPENSATE ADEQUATELY, IN TIME, TO MAKE AMENDS FOR THE INJUSTICE WHICH HAS NOW BEEN DONE AN INNOCENT PEOPLE, AND THAT, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, ETHIOPIA MAY RECEIVE THAT JUSTICE WHICH IS HER DUE.

IN THIS HOUR OF DISILLUSIONMENT FOLLOWING SO LONG A PERIOD OF EXPECTATION AND HOPE IN THE PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY, IT HAS BECOME MY DUTY, BY THIS MESSAGE, TO LAY BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY THE TRUE IMAGE OF THE HOPE WHICH THE DECISION TAKEN BY THE ASSEMBLY HAS ENDANGERED.

/THIS DUTY

THIS DUTY ACCOMPLISHED, I WOULD WISH, IN CLOSING, TO GIVE  
EXPRESSION TO THE HOPE THAT I SHALL LIVE TO SEE THE DAY WHEN JUSTICE  
AND TRUTH WILL FINALLY TRIUMPH OVER THE PETTY AND MUNDANE STRUGGLES  
OF THE PRESENT HOUR. HAILE SELASSIE EMPEROR."

ACTING MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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