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LETTER DATED 24 DECEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF
THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press release issued on
24 December 1998 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia (see annex), concerning Eritrea's refusal to accept all
peace efforts and initiatives, including the latest peace proposal of the
Organization of African Unity.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated
as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Press release issued on 24 December 1998 by the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia

After a long process of intensive work, which comprised a thorough investigation by an ambassadorial committee followed by a review at a ministerial level, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) High-Level Delegation of Heads of State and Government tabled a peace proposal for a peaceful resolution of the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea on 7 November 1998 at Ouagadougou.

The core elements of that proposal are the request that Eritrea pull out its troops from all occupied Ethiopian territory and the demand for the restoration of the Ethiopian Administration, with all its law enforcement organs.

It is also to be noted that that proposal, along with the other elements of the peace package, was tentatively immediately accepted by our delegation, which was led by our Prime Minister, and after a few days was formally accepted by Ethiopia. Eritrea, on the other hand, in conformity with its known behaviour, first tried to wreck the peace process by singling out members of the High-Level Delegation for attack and in general by belittling the proposal put on the table by OAU. While in effect having rejected the proposal, Eritrea continued until the convening of the Summit of the OAU Central Organ on 17 and 18 December 1998, to which the High-Level Delegation was expected to submit its report, trying to create the impression that its final decision was pending.

But it turned out, which could have surprised no one, that what the Eritrean authorities had in store for OAU as a response to its peace proposal, which has been called by the Security Council "fair and balanced", was first a set of questionnaires and then amendments to the proposal, which in effect said "No" to the OAU request that Eritrea withdraw from Ethiopian territory. This represents - together with Eritrea's rejection of the United States-Rwandan peace proposal and the OAU Summit decision of 10 June 1998 - the third peace initiative rejected by Eritrea.

This is what Ethiopia has to deal with as a real challenge in its efforts to resolve peacefully this crisis imposed on its people by Eritrea. Obviously, Ethiopia has no partner for peace in this crisis. OAU has done whatever it could, under difficult circumstances and with little support from other parties, to make a difference for peace, and by impeccably discharging its responsibilities has put on the table a peace proposal which, to reiterate, has been characterized as "fair and balanced" by the Security Council. That proposal was endorsed by the Central Organ of OAU at the Summit level on 18 December 1998 at Ouagadougou, which also called for its speedy implementation.

It now appears obvious that all those who have been waiting until OAU took a final position on the matter have absolutely no excuse for failing to take a clear stand against aggression and for not putting all the necessary pressure on

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the aggressor. The cause of peace and justice will be served in this instance by candid talk done in a transparent manner; not by reticence in the face of duplicity and disingenuous posturing by the Eritrean leadership, which sees no value in peacemaking and for whom might is right. It is time for those with real and genuine commitment for peace in our subregion to stand up and be counted. This involves, among other things, calling on the Eritrean authorities, without mincing words, to come to their senses and telling them directly that the game is up. OAU has discharged its responsibilities and is still continuing to do so. This OAU effort requires the effective support of the international community, which no doubt continues to bear great responsibility for giving diplomacy a chance or for making diplomacy lose all momentum, with all its consequences.
