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Remarks at Ethiopia/Eritrea Peace Agreement Ceremony

December 12, 2000, Algiers, Algeria

As released by the Office of the Spokesman

U.S. Department of State

SECRETARY ALBRIGHT: President Bouteflika, Prime Minister Meles, President Isaías, Presidents Obasanjo and Eyadema, Secretary General Annan, Secretary General Salim, excellencies from the diplomatic corps, guests and friends.

I am grateful to President Bouteflika for his leadership and vision, as well as the invitation to take part in this important ceremony. The Government of Algeria and the Organization of African Unity deserve great praise and recognition for the crucial role they have played in facilitating this peace agreement.

President Clinton asked me to represent him today, and to convey his congratulations to Prime Minister Meles, President Isaías and President Bouteflika. The President has spoken himself with great sadness about this conflict. And now, in equal measure, he has asked me to tell you of his relief and thankfulness that the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea can begin again. To enjoy what he often describes as "the quiet miracle of a normal life."

This is the last stop of what may be my last trip to Africa as Secretary of State. For years, a chorus of voices has alleged that Africa's problems are hopeless. Here today, in this room, and with these signatures, let the message go forth that those voices are wrong; that progress is possible, that peace can be attained.

That is why the United States is proud-not only to have assisted in achieving this agreement-but to have done so in the right way: by supporting the OAU. On behalf of President Clinton, I want to extend special thanks to President Bouteflika for his leadership, and to the Government of Algeria for its collaboration with the United States in this endeavor.

It is indicative of President Bouteflika's commitment to peace, that he continued to provide outstanding leadership well beyond his tenure as OAU Chairman. And we are all indebted to him for guiding the process through to today's ceremony.

Of course, I would not be here on behalf of the President, if it were not for the critical role of our own team.

First and foremost, I want to thank my friend, the former National Security Advisor, and President Clinton's Special Envoy, Anthony Lake-for his tireless efforts over more than two years. He has logged countless miles on his peace-making visits to the region, and to Algeria. His tenacity and generosity in this effort is another example of his selfless commitment to public service.

I also want to especially thank Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice, National Security Council Senior Director Gayle Smith, and Special Advisor John Prendergast. These individuals, and several others, were a force for peace-devoting relentless energy, over a great many days and many long nights, to the task of negotiating a settlement.

In the end, an agreement was reached. And the essence of that agreement is what brings us here today. At its heart, the two combatants agreed to put their trust in an impartial process that can resolve disputes between them.

We must hope that others on this continent will follow the same path of trust and accommodation.

And, of course, the peace we celebrate today is not just a success for international diplomacy. It is a success for the two governments and leaders whose wisdom finally brought an end to the conflict. Above all, it is a victory for the people of both countries. And a promise that those who lived through the ravages of war, may once again reap the benefits of peace.

Now it falls to us in the international community to help them do so. The presence of U.N. Secretary General Annan is symbolic of this commitment. And the rapid deployment of the U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea already gives it practical meaning. I want to thank the Secretary-General for his personal interest and support of UNMEE.

And say the United States is committed to doing its part-from supporting landmine clearance to providing development assistance. We will reinvigorate our relations with both nations as a matter of both humanitarian obligation and national interest.

And the friends of Ethiopia and Eritrea will pray that the bitterness of the last two years can be put to rest. That these two governments and peoples can surmount an even greater challenge. They must now find in their hearts the spirit of reconciliation that will allow them to restore their ties, and shape a common future of peace and progress.

From my office in Washington, I see every day a great monument to the spirit of reconciliation. Within the memorial to Abraham Lincoln are inscribed the words of a great American president.

The words call on a people to rebuild from the ashes of war-to act "with malice toward none; with charity for all. . . to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan-to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace".

To the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea, I say the hope and promise of this day is yours. May your memories of pain and suffering fade far into the past. And may today's peace last long into your children's future.