Since African countries gained independence, the borders – drawn in the wake of 19th century colonialism – have been recurrent sources of conflicts and disputes on the continent. Most of the borders are poorly defined. Approximately two-thirds of the 83,500 km of African land boundaries are neither clearly delimited nor demarcated. The location of strategic natural resources in cross-border areas poses additional challenges. Non-demarcated boundaries are a factor for contention between states and local populations, and a threat for peace and security on the African continent.

Respect for our States’ territorial integrity is a prerequisite for peace and security. The African Union Border Programme (AUBP) is a direct response to the challenge of existing and potential border disputes in Africa. It operates in conformity with the principles of subsidiarity and of respect for the intangibility of African borders as they existed upon achievement of independence, enshrined in legal and political frameworks such as Resolution 16(I) of the July 1964 Cairo Declaration, promulgated by the Organisation of African Unity, and the Constitutive Act of the African Union (Article 4 (b)). The AUBP explicitly pursues the structural prevention of conflicts alongside the integration of African States.

The first ever Conference of African Ministers in Charge of Border Issues was held in Addis Ababa on 7th June 2007. This Conference resulted in the adoption of the first Declaration on the AUBP and its implementation modalities, followed by the second (Addis Ababa, 2010) and the third Declaration, along with the formulation of the AU Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation, the so-called Niamey Convention (Niamey, 17th May 2012). Furthermore, the 7th of June is commemorated annually through the celebration of the “African Border Day”.

In sum, aside from assisting its Member States in the delimitation and demarcation of their borders, the AUBP aims to create new dynamics of cross-border cooperation through:

- Enhancement of good-neighbourly relations on the regional, bilateral and local level
- Peaceful and negotiated settlement of border disputes, and joint management of possible cross-border resources
- Multiplication and dissemination of cross-border cooperation projects through joint initiatives, e.g., shared grain storage systems (food security), micro-credits for women (gender-oriented development), professional training centres for adolescents (fight against unemployment), basic service infrastructure (land use planning), etc.
- Establishment of national/bilateral boundary commissions, and promotion of joint border management in the realms of security, economic development, customs, trade, migration etc., with the ultimate goal of African integration.