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OPENING SPEECH

OF HIS EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI  
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

STRATEGIC CONSULTATION ON THE HORN OF AFRICA

KHARTOUM, SUDAN

8-10 OCTOBER 2017

## **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a pleasure and a privilege to open this consultative meeting on the Horn of Africa. I would like to express the gratitude of the African Union Commission and the Chairperson's personal appreciation to the Government of Sudan for hosting the meeting.

Let me first start by clarifying why the African Union, in close cooperation with IGAD, is convening this consultation. In very simple terms, I believe we are meeting here today because of a pressing awareness that we can do better. We can collectively do better for the people/citizens of the Horn of Africa. Member States of the region can do better; IGAD can do better; the African Union can do better; and the UN and partners can do better to help the Horn of Africa and its people realize their full potential.

We are having this meeting at a time of change and turmoil in the global political and security environment. Multilateralism- its principles, values and institutions- appear to be under siege and old certainties are being increasingly challenged. This shifting global landscape has a direct and substantial impact on our continent. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Horn of Africa where external dynamics have the potential to exacerbate existing peace and security challenges as historical rivalries are deepened and new alliances emerge.

The Horn of Africa is a culturally rich and historically complex part of our continent. It is also one of the most troubled parts of our continent. It is the cradle of our independence: it is in Addis Ababa that we celebrated the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) 54 years ago. And seven years earlier, it was in this city, Khartoum, that the first flag of a formerly colonized African country was raised to mark the independence of a nation.

Today, the Horn of Africa region poses some of the most difficult peace and security challenges facing Africa. More than half the total number of UN and AU peacekeepers are deployed in this region, including in two of our most troubled countries, Somalia and South Sudan. Despite efforts to rid the region of its many challenges, we are still faced with severe crises and violent conflicts. Moreover, the region is faced with emerging threats to peace and security, including, terrorism, piracy, illicit exploitation of natural resources, trafficking in narcotics and human beings, transnational organized crime and mass migration. The region is also affected by the spillover effects of the conflicts outside its own borders: in central Africa, the Sahara-Sahel region, and across the Red Sea in Yemen. Moreover, the geostrategic location of the region makes it vulnerable to the political, economic and religious transformations that unfold in the Gulf and the Middle East at large.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The most important priority for the African Union is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of existing and potential crises and a nuanced appreciation of how to bring about and sustain peace. The nature of current threats to international peace and security has led to the consensus that no single organization has the political leverage and capabilities to act alone. As a result, strengthening partnerships at all levels has become an imperative. As a continental body, the AU must reinforce its partnerships with the RECs/RMs, the UN, the IFIs, CSOs and a host of other actors.

With respect to the Horn of Africa, IGAD remains a vital partner. The African Union has been deepening its engagement and partnership with IGAD. This strategic consultation is indeed the

outcome of joint initiatives and close collaboration with our friends in IGAD, pursuant to the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council in September 2013, to mandate the AU High Level Implementation Panel and IGAD to convene a conference on peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa.

Our mutually supportive and complementary relationship with IGAD benefits both organizations. One of the areas we need to explore further is how to strengthen these complementarities in the fields of conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction.

It is also critically important to welcome and commend the efforts of our international partners. As mentioned, partnerships are a vital element in strengthening our security architecture. We value our partnership with various stakeholders, and in particular, with the United Nations. The UN has been engaged in this region for decades, and has built a strong and effective partnership with the AU, and increasingly with IGAD as well. The AU also has strong complementarities with the UN: we need one another in order to succeed.

Other international partners are also crucial in our efforts to promote the peace and security agenda of the African Union. The European Union is the principal partner of the AU. We share a common commitment to multilateralism and to deepening cooperation among member states in pursuit of an ever closer and more effective union. We have important areas of practical cooperation. Member states of the European Union are also among our most valued partners, and I want to mention, in particular, the Federal Republic of Germany for its support to the work of the AU Peace and Security Department, including this meeting.

One group of international partners who are under-represented at this consultation, but whom we plan to engage in upcoming consultations, are the countries of the Middle East, who are playing an increasingly important role in the Horn of Africa. Much work needs to be done to reach a common understanding of the challenges we face in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea arena.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In terms of expectations for the meeting, we hope that this strategic consultation will provide an opportunity to explore common ground in understanding the peace and security challenges facing the Horn of Africa, thus leading to more effective prevention and resolution of existing and potential conflicts. Current trends in the region provide a strong rationale for the promotion of regional integration in support of lasting peace and stability in the region. The Horn's resources are diversely distributed and could, therefore, be a powerful driver of integration, growth, peace and stability. Our guiding spirit is multilateralism: the shared principles, values and institutions for African and global cooperation in pursuit of shared objectives.

Let me take this opportunity to draw your attention to a few important points:

This meeting is the first in a series of consultations on the Horn of Africa. I am assured that once we drink the waters of the Nile, we will return again;

The AU has reached out to and invited all member states of the Horn of Africa region: this includes Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan and Uganda;

This meeting brings together experts, policy makers, diplomats, academics and civil society representatives to exchange views and reach a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the region;

I appeal to you to do away with formalities and instead have a candid exchange of views and ideas. There are no red lines- only a free and open discussion can be a meaningful one. This is an inclusive forum in which we welcome those who have a substantive contribution to make, even if it challenges our preconceptions and established ways of doing business—indeed, especially if it poses these challenges. Statesmen and senior government officials have too few opportunities for open and informal discussion, and the issues facing us are too important and pressing for us to spend our time on courtesies and formalities.

Finally, I would like to end my statement with another simple idea which may be obvious but nonetheless important to underline: **an integrated Horn of Africa region is one that is united, has a shared vision, consistent policies, is at peace with itself and is well-positioned to negotiate strategic partnerships and rational solutions with external partners.**

Let me also indicate that we are planning similar initiatives for the Sahel and Great Lakes regions to shape a common understanding of the respective countries of each region of the challenges at hand and the best collective response to them.

I look forward to an open and engaging discussion.

I thank you for your kind attention.