3rd Meeting of the HISS of the Member States of IGAD and EAC,
7-8 December 2015,
Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Remarks by the Commissioner for Peace and Security
Ambassador Smail Chergui
Your Excellencies,
Representative of the Executive Secretary General of IGAD,
Representative of the Secretary General of the EAC,
Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you to the 3rd meeting of the Heads of Intelligence and Security Services of the Member States of IGAD and EAC. We are delighted that EAC and IGAD Member States have responded to our invitation at the highest levels of their intelligence and security services, which underscores once again our shared goal to strengthen regional security cooperation and our commitment to a peaceful region.

This third meeting will be an opportunity to review the security situation in East Africa region, refine our strategies to address the numerous challenges and take stoke of the progress made in the implementation of some of our decisions since our last meeting in Kampala in July. From the onset, allow me to give you a brief overview of eight (8) security challenges that the continent and the East African region continues to face from our perspective.

First, the continent is expected to hold 22 elections in 2016 out of which five will be in the East African region namely in Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda (local) and Djibouti. Elections are an opportunity to consolidate democracy and we expect the majority of the polls to be peaceful, but there is always a possibility that some might experience turmoil.

Second, we are concerned that some of the current crises in CAR, Burundi, Somalia and South Sudan might escalate as we near key milestones such as elections, implementation of key provisions of peace agreements or political negotiations. Thirdly, there is also a risk of relapse into conflict for countries that were considered in a post conflict situation. Indeed, we are observing a tendency of some countries relapsing back to the cycle of violent conflicts.

Fourth, the threat of terrorism in Africa is likely to remain high in the near future. The crisis of the state in some countries or the absence of it, the perceived bankruptcy of modern ideologies by some, the lack of strong institutions and social service delivery and international connectedness are increasing the radicalization of our youths and leading to terrorism in the near future.

The so-called Islamic State militant group in the Middle East has also expanded its influence in Africa by courting extremists from Nigeria to Somalia. And not too far from our region, in Sirte, Libya, the so-called Islamic State is estimated to have about 2,000 fighters, up from just 200 in February. From Raqqa in Syria to Sirte in Libya, you could realize the rapid gains made by such a terrorist group and the challenges it poses to
Africa and its neighborhood.

Furthermore, although the world today is focused on the so-called Islamic State, the group’s rise does not diminish or supplant the threat from other terrorist groups intent on attacking our Member States. Al Qaeda and its global affiliates such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Shabaab or Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continue to plot. Some of these groups may even rush to emulate, compete, or to cooperate with the so-called Islamic State.

The ongoing conflict in Yemen is also compounding this problem and threatens the security of the IGAD and EAC regions. There are serious concerns that the Yemeni government’s weak projection of power and the Houthis’ resolve in the north are allowing for swathes of central and eastern Yemen to essentially be ungoverned areas, which is ripe for Al Qaeda's expansion.

There are fears that Yemen has once again become a safe haven for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, to a dramatically lesser extent, the so-called Islamic State militants. The continued lack of adequate screening of individuals fleeing from Yemen increases the possibility that some extremists might blend with the refugees and sneak into the region.

We should not underestimate the power of bad ideas and the terrorist’s creativity as they seek to sow deaths and destruction. The recent incident involving a Russian airline in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt where a small high-explosive device of the size of a can of a soda was planted underneath a passenger’s seat should alert us all to the vulnerabilities of our airlines, particularly in this holiday season and the possibility that some groups might attempt to replicate the same at major airport hubs on the continent. A particular attention should be devoted to the security of our airlines, airports, hotels, key installations and places where people tend to congregate.

Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fifth challenge is that some negative forces such as the Alliance for the Democratic Forces (ADF)-Nalu and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FLDR) also continues to cause instability. The 3 December attack by the ADF in Eringeti in the DR Congo that left 24 people dead including a peacekeeper is instructive in this regard.

Sixth, the region is also likely to remain vulnerable to transnational crimes including drug and arms trafficking, human smuggling, kidnapping-for-ransom, illicit proliferation of arms and money laundering. The worrying trend is that transnational crimes have become intimately intertwined with terrorist groups’ activities and are providing them with new sources of funding.
Seventh, climate change will likely affect the security of the countries in the region. It is already causing environmental degradation, and in some cases leading to desertification, floods, drought and famine. As a result of all this, there has been an unprecedented rural/urban migration leading to both stresses and strains on the limited services thereby increasing the potential for more conflicts. Some 15 million children are at risk from hunger, disease and water shortages in east and southern Africa because of the strengthening El Nino weather phenomenon. El Nino has caused the worst drought in more than 30 years in Ethiopia and its effect could be harsh in Somalia in the coming weeks/months. Such phenomenon should be expected to increase in the near future because of global warming.

Lastly, this is all happening in an environment of economic downturn. The IMF, the World Bank and other international financial institutions are predicting that the economic growth rates for our region will continue to slow down in the next 6 months due to the fall of oil prices and the continent’s over reliance on exports of raw materials. The continent will also continue to be vulnerable to downturns in demand overseas. China’s Economic downturn and the US likely decision to raise interest rates are likely to negatively affect African economies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Confronting these challenges will require us to be strategic because the issues and the enemies of peace are strategic. There is a convergence on the threats and the solutions are clear, but it is time to translate multilateralism into results through meaningful and creative domestic actions and decisions. Three examples come to mind:

The first would be to start with the implementation of already agreed decisions. I am pleased that there is progress on this front and I look forward to getting a briefing from the last Chair on the progress made following the visit to Algiers and on the MoU establishing the Regional Unit of Fusion and Liaison.

Secondly, we need to adopt appropriate legislation that protects the lives of our citizens, and the values of tolerance and rule of law that underpin our societies. At the AU we have developed an AU Model Law, which provides a guide for Member States. We will avail it to you.

Thirdly, we must ensure that counter-radicalization messages are data driven. We need to determine what type of messages would actually deter Jihadi recruits. We all know that terrorists and other extremists prey on vulnerable youths online, communicate electronically and when they travel they leave a trail. Our services need access to these data.

These are some of the concrete examples that come to mind and that I hope will be discussed in the course of the next two days. Ultimately, the best antidote to all these
threats will be to build strong, responsive and accountable state institutions at the local and national levels that deliver essential services, as well as ensure inclusive political processes, rule of law and public security. This is key to preventing conflicts and consolidating peace building gains.

I Thank You