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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 5513 822 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321  
Email: [situationroom@africa-union.org](mailto:situationroom@africa-union.org)

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AFRICAN UNION SYMPOSIUM ON  
VICTIMS OF TERRORIST ACTS

ALGIERS, ALGERIA  
27-28 OCTOBER 2014

## CONCLUSIONS

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1. The African Union (AU) Symposium on Victims of Terrorist Acts took place at the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), in Algiers, from 27 to 28 October 2014. The symposium was held at the initiative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and within the framework of the United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, unanimously adopted by the General Assembly in 2006. The Strategy, *inter alia*, urged an end to the dehumanization of victims of terrorism and called on UN Member States to put in place national systems of assistance that would promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate the normalization of their lives. In the Strategy, the UN Member States also pledged to strive to promote international solidarity in support of victims and foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and for its condemnation.
2. The Symposium was attended by delegates from the following AU Member States: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Tunisia. AU partner states that attended the meeting included Spain and the United States. The Symposium was also attended by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Economic Community of central African States (ECCAS). Other international and regional organizations participating in the Symposium included the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
3. In addition, the Symposium was attended by a number of civil society and non-governmental organizations established by victims of terrorist acts and their families, including the International Federation of Associations of Victims of Terrorism (IFAVT), Djazairouna (Algeria), Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre (Somalia), Invisible Children (Uganda), National Organization of Victims of Terrorism (ONVT) (Algeria), Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) and Victims of Terrorism Organization (Kenya).
4. The Symposium was also attended by the Kenya Psychological Association (Kenya), the African Prosecutors Association (APA) and the Network of Journalists for Peace and Security in Africa (NetPeace).
5. The Symposium highlighted the human cost of terrorism and the devastating consequences of terrorist acts on individuals and communities, including the loss of life, injury and disability, psychological trauma, loss of livelihoods and the triggering of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict, thereby undermining human rights, peace-building and reconciliation efforts and socio- economic development.
6. The participants had in-depth discussions on a number of thematic issues, including on the social and economic impact of terrorist acts on civilians and the population at large; the challenges and opportunities in collaboration between the governmental institutions and civil society; the role of victims and their associations in countering violent extremism; the mass media, and the criminal justice response to victims of terrorist acts. These

discussions highlighted pertinent issues. On this basis, the participants put forward the following recommendations:

**a) Support and assistance to the victims of terrorist acts**

7. Participants emphasized that response measures undertaken by Member States should take into consideration the immediate, medium and long term needs of the victims to ensure their timely and sustainable rehabilitation.

8. Participants called for adequate training to members of the police and first responders including in psychological first aid, essential trauma care, protection of the privacy of the victims, and procedures and measures to identify loss of life as well as identify damage to, and loss of, property. Participants also called for medium and long term responses in the area of physical and psychological rehabilitation, livelihoods support and re-integration.

9. Participants expressed concern that terrorist acts severely impacts women and children, who are often the direct target of terrorist acts or are left without support or guardian as a result thereof. Participants therefore encouraged response mechanisms that are tailored to the needs of the different affected groups.

10. Moreover, the psychological well-being of victims featured as an issue of concern. In this respect, participants recognized the long-term trauma that could result from terrorist acts and which requires sufficient attention and response to mitigate its effects on individual health and reintegration into social and professional life. Moreover, Participants expressed concern over the negative effects of terrorist acts in weaving mistrust among communities and undermining social cohesion. They highlighted the need for justice and inclusive national peace-building processes that takes into consideration the views and contribution of the victims and which also focuses on nation-wide healing in order to ensure sustainable peace and reconciliation.

11. Participants commended the AU Commission for highlighting the plight of victims of terrorist acts, including within the context of the reports presented by the Chairperson of the Commission to the Peace and Security Council, as well as for the convening of the present Symposium. They encouraged the AU Commission to continue with such efforts.

**b) Criminal Justice Response to Support Victims of Terrorist Acts**

12. Participants noted with satisfaction that a number of Member States have in place laws and practices that guarantee the right of victims to access the criminal justice system and seek redress. This is in addition to good practices in the protection of witnesses and compensation for damages. The discussion also highlighted the need for Member States to adopt adequate counter-terrorism legislation that clearly defines terrorist acts in line with the 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and the international instruments adopted under the auspices of the UN that deal with terrorism and related crimes.

13. Participants also welcomed the entry into force of the 2004 AU Protocol on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which, *inter alia*, commits States Parties to identify, detect, freeze and confiscate or seize any funds and any other assets used or allocated for the purpose of committing a terrorist act, and to establish a mechanism to use such funds to compensate the victims or their families. In this regard, Participants also stressed the need for effective national mechanisms to detect such financial flows, including through the establishment of financial intelligence units and other measures to counter the financing of terrorism and money laundering.

14. Furthermore, Participants stressed that criminal proceedings must be conducted with reasonable speed, in line with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, to guarantee not only the right of the accused, but also to avoid prolonging the suffering of the victims and give them closure and the sense of justice they seek.

15. Participants further encouraged the AU Commission to develop and deliver capacity-building activities to Member States on the international best practices in enhancing the criminal justice response to victims, including on the basis of the AU Model Law on Counter Terrorism.

#### ***c) Role of the Media***

16. Participants called for an active role for the media in de-legitimizing terrorism through highlighting the plight of victims, while respecting their privacy, and for more responsible media reporting that avoid the glorification of perpetrators. In this regard, Participants encouraged an active role by NetPeace – the network established with AU assistance to facilitate reporting on peace and security issues and African-led efforts by African media - towards promoting such an approach among the media and journalists in Africa.

17. Participants also noted that civil society have effectively deployed the media as a preventative tool, through encouraging reporting and sharing of information on terrorist acts, as well as in promoting peace and tolerance through engaging religious leaders and the wider public.

18. Participants further noted with concern that social medial remains a key tool used by terrorist groups for radicalization and recruitment. Participants therefore stressed the urgent need for civil society, including community and religious leaders and authorities, to utilize the media in reaching out to the population and in countering extremist ideology, as well as for preaching peace and tolerance and promoting human rights.

#### ***d) Role of the victims of terrorist acts in Countering Violent Extremism***

19. Participant recognized that victims have an important role to play in providing a powerful counter-narrative against terrorism and serving as credible messengers against the ideology of violence and hatred. In this regard, Participants commended the initiatives and activities undertaken by associations, including through the media production to ensure that

the voices of victims are heard and working with communities and religious leaders and authorities to promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

***e) Establishment of a Network of African Associations of Victims of Terrorist Acts***

20. The victims of terrorist acts and their associations deliberated on, and exchanged, proposals on the objectives, participation and modalities of work of the envisaged network. They were thus encouraged to join efforts towards its establishment.

21. Participants requested the AU Commission to provide the necessary advisory support, as well as to continue to provide a forum for interaction and consultation among the victims of terrorist acts and their associations, Member States, the relevant UN agencies and the international partners.