Statement of H.E. Ambassador Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security at the Opening of the Eighth Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 15 May 2015

- Chairperson of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security H.E Sekeramyi,
- Honorable Ministers and Heads of delegations,
- Excellences,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of her Excellency Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, I would like to reiterate my sincere gratitude to Comrade Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Chairperson of the African Union, for his leadership and dedication to the African cause for prosperity, security and stability.

As we speak now, President Mugabe has travelled to Mali to oversee the signatory of the peace agreement between the Malian government and the opposition in the north. This has been a very difficult process to achieve and the presence of President Mugabe, current Chairperson of the AU, at the ceremony is not only a testimony of his dedication to the African peace, but it is also another signal of his leadership and the way he is handling the affairs of the African Union during this year of his chairmanship.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all the participants to the 8th meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security. This meeting is taking place at a critical juncture with respect to the African Standby Force and its Rapid Deployment Capability, as well
as the operationalization of ACIRC, as a transitional arrangement in our peace efforts.

- Excellences,
- Ladies and gentlemen

When you last met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 14 January 2014, you expressed your determination to enhance the continent’s leadership and ownership, in addressing the peace and security challenges confronting Africa. Among other issues, it was agreed at the meeting that Member States, the Commission, the Regional Economic Communities and their Regional Mechanisms work together in the speedy implementation of the relevant recommendations of the Gambari Panel with respect to the full operationalization of the ASF and its Rapid Deployment Capability, funding for AU peace support operations, continuous capacity building and related issues.

The revised Roadmap III on ASF-RDC and ACIRC being currently implemented was built on the platform of the previous Roadmaps I and II, recommendations in the Report of the Gambari Panel of Experts on the ASF, the ASF Training Needs Assessment and the workplan on the African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crises.

The Commission, in collaboration with the RECs/RMs, has finalized the development of the continental Roster System called the African Standby Capacity Roster. The next step is to ensure that the Roster is functional through its population with appropriate expertise for use in ASF operations.

As part of the efforts to strengthen the multidimensional and integrated character of both the ASF and African-led peace support operations, additional civilians have been recruited on a short-term basis within the AU Peace Support Operations Division to cover key areas such as Conduct and Discipline, Mission support, Human Resource Planning and Human Rights, Protection and Gender.
- Excellences,
- Ladies and gentlemen

As you are aware, funding for AU peace operations continue to face challenges that impact on Africa’s peace efforts. In this regard, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, during its Summit held in January 2015, decided to increase Member States assessed contributions towards the AU Peace Fund. To date, the AU has heavily relied on the financial resources from partners in support of peace support operations, including in the operationalization of the ASF.

I also wish to recall that during its 22\textsuperscript{nd} Ordinary Session held from 29 to 30 January 2014, the AU Assembly directed that both the ACIRC and RDC concepts be harmonized in order to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure that the ACIRC assists in accelerating the operationalization of the ASF-RDC. I am pleased that our meeting here has made progress in implementing the Assembly directive.

The process of operationalizing the ACIRC and its integration into the ASF is ongoing. The ACIRC Planning Cell is already established within the AU Peace Support Operations Division and is composed of officers from the ACIRC Voluntary Nations. In this respect, I am also pleased to inform you that the ACIRC Command Post Exercise was successfully conducted in Tanzania in October 2014.

Efforts have also been made by the Commission to ensure the provision of the required Command, Control, Communications and Information Systems (C3IS) architecture for the upcoming AMANI Africa II Exercise. At the same time, work on the Memorandum of Understanding on the Continental Logistic Base between the AU and the Government of Cameroon has gained momentum and is now close to finalization.

Furthermore, progress has been made in the development of the Police dimension of the ASF. We launched the Police Strategic Support Group, as a
mechanism to develop and coordinate African police capacities and expertise for peace support operations.

- Excellences,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

The Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms have done commendable work in implementation of APSA. It is noteworthy that the standby forces of ECCAS, EASF and SADC have already attained full operational capacity. This is an indication that Africa is able to achieve the deadline of December 2015 for the operationalization of the ASF. We must encourage the remaining RECs to follow the example set by these three RECs.

While we continue to build long term capacity for the ASF, the AU is engaged in ongoing conflict resolution in the continent. AU engagements in Somalia, Mali, and the Central African Republic, just to mention a few, are testimony to these efforts. I wish to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to all African peacekeepers that lost their lives in the line of duty seeking peace and stability in the continent.

Concerning the fight against pandemics in our Continent, I wish to recall that the PSC decided to authorize, in August 2014, the deployment of an AU-led Military and Civilian Humanitarian Mission, comprising of medical doctors, nurses, and other medical and paramedical personnel, as well as military personnel to address the EBOLA Outbreak in West Africa. The strong commitments and resource mobilization shown by both AU Member States and partners in the deployment of the African Union Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa is highly commendable. This remarkable effort in containing the Ebola Virus disease provided a successful lesson, in future, the ASF can be deployed to address security threats posed by pandemics.

- Excellences,
- Ladies and gentlemen

You all agree with me, that the rise of terrorism and extremism is the major challenge that is negatively affecting some parts of our continent. Terrorist activities have expanded on our continent, with East Africa, West Africa and North Africa being the most affected regions. Whilst it is important to address some of the contributing factors such as poverty and lack of opportunities, it is very urgent that we mobilize the necessary intelligence to effectively fight terrorism and to address the conditions that give rise to radicalization and extremism. It is in this context that the Nouakchott and Djibouti intelligence sharing mechanisms have been established. It is envisaged to setup similar mechanisms in other regions of the continent.

The AU’s support for the Multinational Joint Taskforce against Boko Haram is an embodiment of the continent’s sustained efforts to combat terrorism. In this respect, I commend the joint efforts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin. The results achieved by their combined effort is a model that can be replicated in other parts of the continent faced by similar threats.

In concluding, I would like to stress that, as a continent, we now need to focus more on conflict prevention to add value to ongoing peace efforts. Prevention is better than cure. In this regard, the speedy operationalization of the ASF and its RDC, along the consolidation of other components of the African Peace and Security Architecture, is critical and requires continuous political engagement and resource mobilization by all of us.

It is my conviction that the declaration that you adopt at the end of your deliberations will provide further guidance and impetus to the attainment of our common objective to enhance peace in Africa.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.