HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON “EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE COUNTERTERRORISM RESPONSES: A REGIONAL APPROACH”

10-11 DECEMBER 2017
ORAN, ALGERIA

OPENING STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR SMAÏL CHERGUI,
AU COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
Your Excellency, Mr. Abdelkader Messahel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria,
Your Excellency, Mr. Taye Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General of United Nations for Political Affairs,
Your Excellency, Mr. Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, AU Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism,
Excellencies, Ambassadors and representatives of African Union Member States,
Excellencies, representatives of the international partners of the African Union,
Distinguished representatives of the United Nations, regional and international organizations,
Excellency the Governor of Oran,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is once again a happy occasion to be in Oran Elbahia, a city of promotion of dialogue and peace in Africa, hosting us and putting in place all necessary arrangements for the success of our meetings. On behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, and on my own behalf, I would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, for the great efforts he is exerting in his capacity as the African Union Leader on the Issue of Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa.

I want also to thank the government and the people of Algeria their unwavering and continuous support for the work of the African Union and its commission. Today, the capital city of Algiers hosts two African institutions that are critical to our efforts in preventing and combating terrorism and violent extremism. These are the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (CAERT) and the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL).

I also wish to express my high appreciation for partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) for all the support provided to make this meeting possible.

I wish also to thank all participants from member states and partners for attending our meeting.

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

These last years have been deeply marked by terrorist barbarism and this issue continued to feature prominently on the agenda of the African Union and the international community as a whole. This threat has taken on greater proportions and expanded
geographically, with unprecedented levels of violence taking place in various parts of the African continent. Our gathering here today takes place against the background of some of the deadliest acts of terrorism witnessed to date. On the 24th of November, 311 worshippers were killed in the attack on al-Rawda mosque in the north of Egypt. This attack claimed the lives of sons, fathers and grandfathers, shattering entire families. Six weeks before this devastating incident, another 512 people were killed in Mogadishu. This attack was the deadliest in Somalia’s history and the third-deadliest act of terrorism in recorded history. In Nigeria, and between late November and early December alone, an estimated 65 lives were lost in two separate suicide attacks on a mosque and a market. These incidents are just a few examples of the continuous acts of violence perpetrated against innocent civilians and peacekeepers in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions over the past years.

It must also be stressed that terrorism and violent extremism not only undermine international peace and security, and the values and principles that characterize our diverse societies, but also results in very high human and material costs. It has a debilitating economic impact which casts a shadow on the economic development of the continent, by stifling the growth of the GDP of the affected states. It should be noted that the International Monetary Fund now includes terrorist threats as one of the main risks for the economic outlook. To take just this example, the development of tourism in Africa is seriously affected by the series of attacks perpetrated by terrorist groups. The damage to the sector will affect the economy, resulting in lower production, tax revenues and foreign exchange reserves; as well as a drop in investor confidence. In the same vein, the fight against terrorism absorbs limited financial resources. Intensification of military missions is costly and the unpredictability of terrorist strikes often requires additional security spending, leading to significant shortfalls in government budget targets.

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The recent horrendous terrorist attacks cited previously, are an urgent call for action and a true test of our resolve, which remains steadfast. Over the past years, and in addressing this scourge, the AU has adopted, and is guided by, a range of policy and legally binding instruments. The AU’s approach has also continuously adapted to the changing nature and manifestation of the terrorist threat in Africa and the impact of global developments. In this respect, the AU developed a range of institutions, mechanisms and innovative tools that respond to the terrorist threat and which are situated within the wider African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

In its approach, the AU continues to emphasize the need for addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, integrated security and law-enforcement responses, and sustainable post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. These integrated and mutually reinforcing components are outlined in the landmark communique adopted by the 455th
meeting of the Peace and Security Council, held at the level of Heads of States and Government, on 2 September 2014 in Nairobi.

From the AU Mission in Somalia, to the Regional Cooperative Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army, and all the way to the Multi-National Joint Task Force against Boko Haram; thousands of men and women in uniform are putting their lives on the line to defend our agenda for peace, stability and development. It is because of their sacrifices that the capabilities of the targeted terrorist groups are now significantly degraded and the conditions for recovery and development are created. We take this opportunity today to pay tribute to them and reiterate our gratitude.

The African Union, through its various institutions, such as CISSA, CAERT, and most recently AFRIPOL, have continued to build capacities of intelligence services and law enforcement agencies to prevent and combat terrorism in line with the African Union instruments and frameworks. The Nouakchott and Djibouti Processes for enhancing security cooperation in the Sahel and East Africa regions remain instrumental in building confidence and fostering common approaches among the regions’ intelligence services. The African Union also recognizes that terrorism breeds in environments of instability and political strife. It therefore continues to invest substantially in mediation and conflict resolution in all affected countries and regions.

These efforts would not have been possible without the strong commitment of African states which bear the brunt of this scourge. Nor would it have been possible without the support of our international partners. I therefore wish to take this opportunity to applaud and commend their efforts.

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

While we celebrate this progress, we should also acknowledge that there remain serious gaps in the implementation of our counter-terrorism framework. This becomes all the more urgent as we witness the growing threat of terrorism in Africa and the impact of global developments on our security. With the defeat of the so-called Islamic State in the middle-east, Africa is witnessing the group’s growing presence in the Sahel region and beyond. The United Nations estimates that of the 30,000 foreign fighters that have joined ISIS in Syria, 6,000 are from Africa. These elements are making their way back to the continent with serious implications to national security. Taking charge of the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and their return to the continent necessitates stronger cooperation in many areas, including the exchange of information, better knowledge of the profiles of returnees and foreign fighters, the detection of their movements through the different routes, as well as the overall improvement of border management.
As we respond to the different terrorist threats, there is a critical need to address the gaps in our criminal justice systems, including outdated legislation and limited law enforcement and court capacities. We must also reflect on how we can further ensure that the work of the intelligence services complements the wider criminal justice system to ensure a rule-of-law based approach to countering terrorism both at the national and regional levels.

In terms of peace support operations and ad-hoc security arrangements to counter-terrorism and transnational crime, the African Union, without a doubt, has set a unique example at the global level. We continue to record success after success despite the significant capacity constraints we are faced with. Moving forward, and to consolidate the gains achieved in Somalia, central Africa, the Sahel and elsewhere, it is critical that we complement military operations with integrated stabilization measures. This is no easy task and will require an unwavering political will backed by significant resources. Without such an investment, all the work that we have done over the past years will be undone.

Additionally, we must strive to transform our commitments into action while seeking to consolidate, strengthen and operationalize and the various counter-terrorism strategies adopted at the national, regional and continental levels to ensure coherency and effectiveness.

Finally, we must make a serious and long-term investment in preventing violent extremism. Interventions should be tailored to address the particular vulnerabilities and provide meaningful and effective alternatives for livelihoods and political participation. In so doing, we have to engage the full range of actors, particularly the civil society, community leaders and religious authorities. Furthermore, it is of equal importance to invest in the social and cultural resilience factors that have prevented violent extremism from taking hold.

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As our populations experience and witness the horrors of terrorism, they turn to us for answers, for guidance and for respite from violence. Therefore, this meeting is a call for action. As we deliberate over the coming two days, we should consider how to recalibrate and strengthen our efforts to address the persisting gaps in our frameworks while upholding the AU principles of respect for human rights, the rule of law and good governance.

I encourage all of you to engage candidly and constructively so we may leave Oran with renewed commitment and strengthened determination to work coherently, comprehensively and effectively in preventing and combating terrorism and violent extremism.

Thank you.