
Your Excellency Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Your Excellency Ambassador Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security, African Union Commission,

Your Excellencies, outgoing as well as new Members of the Panel of the Wise,

Distinguished representatives of the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution,

Distinguished Representatives of Multilateral Organisations,

Your Excellences Former Presidents, High-level Representatives and Special Representatives,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of fellow Panel members, I wish to welcome you to this 14th Meeting of the African Union’s Panel of the Wise.

As an institution, the Panel of the Wise is now strengthened by the high calibre of its new members: Dr Lakhdar Brahimi from Algeria, representing North Africa; Mr Edem Kodjo from Togo, representing West Africa; Dr Albina Faria de Assis Pereira Africano from Angola representing Central Africa, Dr Luísa Diogo from Mozambique representing Southern Africa, and Dr Specioza Naigaga Wandira Kazibwe from Uganda, representing East Africa.

Dr Brahimi’s experience as a senior diplomat and Minister of Foreign Affairs of his country, Algeria, his senior positions in the League of Arab States and the United Nations (including as Special Envoy); Mr Edem Kodjo’s experience at the highest levels of government (as Finance and Foreign Affairs Minister and Prime Minister) of Togo, as well as his extensive understanding of our
continental organisation (where he served as Secretary General between 1978 and 1983); Dr Albina Pereira Africano who was Minister of Petroleum of Angola from 1992 to 1999 and Minister of Industry between 1999 and 2000 as well as having held the position of Special Advisor to the President of Angola on Regional Affairs; Dr Speciosa Wandira who has been Minister of Gender and Community Development from 1991 to 1994, Member of Parliament and, between 1994 and 2003 Vice-President of Uganda; and Dr Luisa Diogo, Prime Minister of Mozambique between 2004 and 2010, having held several ministerial portfolios including Finance Minister and Minister for Planning. Ladies and gentlemen, the calibre of the new members of the Panel of the Wise is clear.

Esteemed colleagues, on behalf of the existing members and friends of the Panel, I would like to express sincere appreciation for your willingness to support our Continental organisation by taking on this challenging role. Indeed, your experience, knowledge and expertise will undoubtedly strengthen the Panel of the Wise, solidifying its role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, taking it into new and exciting directions.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

This auspicious occasion of inaugurating the third Panel of the Wise also offers an opportunity for reflecting on the essence of this body, progress made in the seven years of its existence, and the opportunities as well as challenges lying ahead. I do recognize that perhaps in terms of institutiona’ development, seven years may be too short a period for any meaningful assessment. Yet, the responsibility entrusted to the Panel is so profound to the extent that every action, every omission, and every minute generates a cumulative impact determining the dynamic which this Panel is expected to influence.
Apart from its statutory standing, as articulated in the Peace and Security Protocol; and later in 2007 in the modalities of its functioning – the Panel essentially encompasses the collective experience, insight, disposition and determination of the members who are privileged to serve in it. It brings to bear this cumulative asset; valorising the living knowledge of the past and connecting it with the present and the future to enhance the capacity of our continental organisation. The calling that the Panel has been given – prevention of conflict - is at the core for the realization of the Africa vision: a united and prosperous continent which is at peace with itself.

Colleagues, during the past seven years of its existence, the Panel of the Wise remained steadfast along the course of discharging its responsibilities. On behalf of my colleagues and with due modesty I can report that we have endeavoured to achieve successes in a number of fronts. The most immediate and somehow explicit testimony is the very consolidation of the Panel itself as an important pillar in the architecture of the Peace and Security Council. The qualitative growth we are celebrating today, in terms of its size and composition; respect and acceptance accorded by member states; and its synchronized functioning within the structures of the African Union are important milestones worthy of recognition

**Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen**

It is in this respect that I would like to concur with the Commissioner’s assertion that the last seven years have seen our Panel gradually become an important component of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). We did indeed try our best to develop an institution that adds value to the Union and that, through its actions, demonstrates the practical benefits of preventive diplomacy.

Soon after its establishment, the most immediate task was to embark on outlining the operational modalities of the Panel, an aspect that was not
elaborated in the Peace and Security Protocol which provided for the creation of the Panel defining its role, mandate and membership (among others). Completion of this task gave us a clear picture of the types of actions we should focus on in support of our primary mission: that of advising the Council and the Chairperson of the Commission on all matters pertaining to the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa. The Modalities clearly enumerate a series of possible activities the Panel can undertake: from facilitating the establishment of channels of communication between the Council/the Chairperson and parties to a dispute; conducting fact-finding missions; carrying out shuttle diplomacy between parties, especially in cases where parties are not ready to engage in formal talks; encourage parties to engage in political dialogue, adopt confidence-building measures and carry out reconciliation processes; assist and advise mediation teams engaged in formal negotiations; etc.

These instruments were fundamental in guiding us, as a Panel, to define specific areas of focus and operations. Yet, as we met here for the first time during December 2007, the challenge of translating these modalities into a feasible modus operandi, into concrete activities that could add value to our continental organisation became clear – indeed, I would consider the tenure of our first panel as essentially a period of creativity and discovery. Under the guidance of our Chairperson, late President Ahmed Ben Bella, this was an exciting but difficult period – as we tested, through trial and error the best ways in which to deliver the mandate of the Panel of the Wise.

I should also note that this period of discovery was not without its challengees, as we were asked from the very beginning to support the African Union in addressing several conflict situations. Indeed, the need for preventive diplomacy, including good offices and fact-finding, conciliation and consultation is ever present - and in fact, the very first mission of the Panel, to the Central African Republic, was undertaken before the inauguration of the
Panel in December 2007. Since then, we have devoted a considerable amount of energy and time to preventive diplomacy missions, in support of our Peace and Security Council, our Chairperson as well as the African Union’s Special Envoys and Special Representatives.

At another level, the origins of our Panel’s “horizon scanning” and thematic work can be traced to this initial period as we agreed to have a yearly focus on a specific theme relevant to conflict prevention and/or peace-building in order to “stimulate a policy debate or to raise awareness on themes related to conflict prevention and peace building”. This process of horizon scanning has coalesced in the Panel’s Thematic Reports. To date, we have devoted our attention to four thematic reflections on: “Election Related Disputes and Political Violence”, “Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Africa”, “Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts in Africa” and “Strengthening Political Governance for Peace, Security and Stability in Africa”. These thematic reports have not only contributed to a deeper understanding of each theme, but perhaps more importantly have had direct impact on the work of our Union. To mention but a few examples, our work on women and children affected by conflict has contributed to the mainstreaming of gender in the work of the PSC, the holding of a yearly briefing to the PSC on the issue as well as the appointment of a Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. And, as we meet here today, a transitional justice framework for the African Union is being considered for review by our Heads of State and Government.

Equally important was our decision to engage in the prevention of election-related disputes and conflicts as a key focus of our direct conflict prevention engagement. This decision, taken early in 2008, expressed our commitment to undertake information-gathering missions aimed at evaluating pre-election situations and examining the modalities of the involvement of the Panel. To date, this remains a considerable dimension of our operations, with Panel
members as well as member of the Friends of the Panel being regularly deployed across the continent. Indeed, our members have been deployed to situations as varied as Egypt, Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa among many others.

Two other dimensions of our work deserve to be mentioned. The first relates to the creation in 2012 of the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise) already mentioned by Ambassador Chergui. This is an umbrella network bringing together similar mechanisms at the level of the RECs and Regional Mechanisms, AU’s High Level Representatives and Special Envoys, the Friends of the Panel, and importantly, individual mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at national and subnational levels. In my personal view, the potential of PanWise to strengthen our ability to effectively contribute, through preventive action, the de-escalation of conflict at local, national and regional levels should not be underestimated. PanWise needs to be nurtured, supported and strengthened in the years to come. To date, several missions have been undertaken under the PanWise umbrella, demonstrating the practical benefits of increased collaboration and coordination in conflict prevention, management and resolution across our Continent.

The second dimension I would like to highlight is that of our support to the work of the African Union’s Special Envoys, Special Representatives and Mediators. Here, the role of our Secretariat in facilitating training, capacity-building, knowledge generation, among others, must be emphasised, including our lead support to the development of the AU’s Mediation Guidelines, to the Knowledge Management Framework for Mediation Processes as well as the AU’s Mediation Handbooks.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests
The rationale of the Panel is informed by the underlying premise that "prevention is better than cure", which in our institutional context could be translated to "conflict prevention is better/cheaper/easier than conflict management/intervention". Yet, in a rapidly moving environment, where crises quickly degenerate into violent conflict, where human and financial resources are scarce and over-stretched, how can we make sure that a culture of prevention is nurtured. How do we instil such a culture across our organisation so that we are able to address current problems while keeping a watchful eye on fragile situations and, whenever necessary, intervene early enough?

To me, this has been the greatest challenge – a challenge I know is not specific to us here at the African Union, but nevertheless a challenge that requires our careful reflection and creativity, courage and determination. And herein lies, in my view, the importance, indeed the centrality of our Panel as a conflict prevention tool at the disposal of our Chairperson and our Peace and Security Council.

Furthermore, and as earlier intimated, operational modalities of the Panel provide for a broad scope of actions and initiatives. During the past seven years, together with its smaller size, the potential of the panel was not fully harnessed. There is still a lot of room for the panel to make a bigger contribution to the Council and to the Commission Chairperson, particularly now that its composition has been enhanced. There is a unique dimension of our Panel: the ability to pronounce itself independently on any issue related to the promotion of peace, security and stability it deems relevant. Dear colleagues, this is indeed a sui generis provision in the context of our institutional make-up, giving us a degree of independence but also of responsibility. As our activities continue to deepen, our relations with the PSC, the Chairperson and other bodies of the Union is also likely to grow in strength in both magnitude and dimension.
Personally, it has been an honour to be associated with this great institution which is the African Union Panel of the Wise. It has been a pleasure to work closely with esteemed leaders and colleagues Our Chairperson, the Late President Ben Bella, President Kenneth Kaunda, President Miguel Trovoada, Madame Marie Madeleine Kalala-Ngoy, Dr Mary Chinery Hesse, Dr Brigalia Bam and Mme Elizabeth Pignon. And it is for me an honour to become a member of the “Friends of the Panel” group and continue to support the African Union Panel of the Wise as appropriate.

Allow me to conclude by conveying sincere gratitude to the Secretariat of the Panel for the tireless efforts of its members in ensuring the smooth functioning of our body. I would like also to thank Excellences AU Commissioners as well as the various Directorates of the Commission. Particular mention needs to be made of the Commissioner and the Directorate for Peace and Security for the professional support rendered to us. It is my hope and expectation the Panel Secretariat will be further strengthened and better equipped.

I thank you.