EXPERTS WORKSHOP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARMS TRADE TREATY OBLIGATIONS RELATING TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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OPENING STATEMENT

BY

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Madam Olatokunbo IGE, Director of the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa,

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Distinguished representatives of the UN and NGOs,

Esteemed experts and resource persons,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and indeed, a privilege for me to welcome you all to the African Union Commission, at this important workshop, organized in collaboration with UNREC and the Eastern Africa Regional Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In fact, this workshop is an important step forward in giving effect to the Arms Trade Treaty, a legal instrument considered as ground-breaking and the first that aims to regulate international trade in conventional weapons for the purpose of contributing to international and regional peace, security and stability, reducing human suffering and promoting transparency and responsible action by States Parties in the international trade in conventional arms.

The aim of this workshop is to raise awareness among different stakeholders on the Treaty and its human rights and gender-related obligations. The workshop will also provide a platform to discuss the role of different stakeholders in contributing to an effective implementation of the Treaty, existing legislative frameworks and
implementation measures, challenges inherent in the implementation, as well as the way forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The need for regulated arms trade is an important step in combating the illicit trade, proliferation and circulation of conventional weapons, particularly small arms. Certainly their availability and ease of use make them the weapon of choice in times of conflict and their impact range from undermining and hindering conflict management, resolution and peace-keeping efforts during conflicts, to reconstruction and development in post-conflict situations, as well as the maintenance of societal security.

It can be noted also that the majority of conflict deaths in Africa are caused by small arms, contributing to large scale suffering, destruction and human rights violations including unlawful killings, rape, forced recruitment of children, displacements, as well as, attacks against peace-keepers and humanitarian workers. Small arms greatly hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance where it is needed.

I would like to indicate that, as of today, 16 AU Member States have ratified the Treaty with 23 more Signatories. Clearly, there is still more work to be done as this is not a true reflection of the strong support that African Union Member States had for the Treaty since the negotiations began up to its adoption. Indeed, the continent was a committed supporter throughout the process and has taken pride in working with the international community in order to achieve this landmark Treaty.
This commitment was expressed through the African Common Position on an ATT. It can be recalled that the Common Position was called for by the 17th AU Summit of July 2011 and was developed through a series of consultations with Member States and Regional Economic Communities. The Common Position was subsequently endorsed by the 20th Summit of January 2013. The scope and standards called for by the Common Position were in fact higher than those eventually included in the Treaty. We recognize the dynamics and realities of intergovernmental negotiations processes and the fact that compromises had to be made in order to achieve agreement. However, this should not prevent us from applying the highest standards possible to realize the object and purpose of the Common Position and the Treaty.

It is with the same dedication that we must work towards the universalization of the Treaty on the continent. We should recognize, however, that it is not enough to sign, or even ratify it. States, among other things, must establish and implement not only effective export regimes, but also import regimes so that there are adequate controls and transparency measures in place by governments to prevent unlawful diversion and contribute to the confidence building measures the Treaty aims to provide.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The ATT obligations is to stop the provision of conventional arms, ammunition, parts and components to end-users that commit or facilitate human rights violations, including gender-based violence, as reflected in particular in Articles 6, 7 and 8.

The Treaty does not have an independent verification regime and governments remain primarily responsible for implementing its provisions and assessing the risk that arms
transfers could be used to commit grave violations of international humanitarian law or human rights law. As they currently stand, the Treaty provisions leave plenty of space for different interpretation by States parties. Therefore, there is a need for a rigorous approach to implementation that incorporates existing international human rights standards and creates a robust and consistent assessment of arms transfers. Moreover, the Treaty provides civil society with the tool to hold accountable those who sell weapons or munitions irresponsibly.

It is for these reasons that this workshop is being held. It is our hope that it will initiate discussions and dialogue among regional experts and practitioners towards developing a better understanding on how to apply the human rights related obligations of the Treaty and paves the way for the development and implementation of a practical guide for the implementation of the relevant articles of the Treaty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding, I wish to encourage you all to make the best of this platform to share your views and ideas on these matters so as to enable us move forward towards realizing the object and purpose of the Treaty.

Thank you for your kind attention.