REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRIVATE MILITARY AND SECURITY COMPANIES

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KEY NOTE ADDRESS

BY
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Master of Ceremonies;

Your Excellency Ms. Anne Beatrice Bullinger, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Switzerland to Ethiopia;

Ms. Mutsa Mangezi, Deputy Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the African Union;

Ms. Alice McGrath-Cregut, the Program Manager of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) Switzerland;

Dr. Yonas Adaye Adeto, Academic Director, Institute for Peace and Security Studies of the University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;

Colleagues from regional and international organisations, development and civil society partners;

Distinguished delegates and representatives of national institutions;

Ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to this important, regional conference on Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs). I feel very honoured to be invited to speak at this important workshop, and to represent the African Union Commission. At the outset, let me start by thanking all the partners for co-organising and co-hosting this essential event here in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In particular, I wish to commend Switzerland and the ICRC for their continued commitment and raising awareness on the need to regulate the use of PMSCs. I would also like to recognise the efforts made by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of the University of Addis Ababa for convening such a range of stakeholders for this event.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

PMSCs often include companies offering services that involve the potential to exercise force in a systematic manner and by military or paramilitary means. These companies often fall outside the direct control of the state in terms of their financing and functioning and recruit employees from many countries to undertake activities in various parts of the world. As colleagues and partners present here are all well aware, the issue of the use of PMSCs has been debated in many post-colonial African countries, especially in countries where complex conflict situations become favourable to the privatisation of security.

The transfer to private companies of certain public security functions, that are traditionally the sole responsibility of states, has significantly changed the actors in the security field and increased the role of PMSCs. Specific patterns on the African continent in this respect include the presence of a vast demand for professional fighters, a fragile or vacuum of state authority, the involvement of private companies in security sector reform (SSR) related training activities, and the downsizing of militaries leading to a reserve of discharged military personnel. The number of PMSCs contracted by African States has only increased over the past decades, leading to legitimate concerns about the sovereignty of states, the accountability of security institutions, and the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

It has been observed that PMSCs in Africa are used for a multitude of purposes relating to passive or defensive security, such as protection of VIPs, the training of national militaries or other services concerning military operations, protection of critical areas, private guarding of persons or property, arms procurement, surveillance and investigative services. PMSCs have also been used in logistic and medical support and humanitarian action in conflict situations.
These activities have put PMSCs very close to conflict situations as (non-state) security providers in armed conflict and post-conflict contexts. PMSCs also move large quantities of weapons and military equipment and could potentially undermine the established law and order if they remain unregulated and unmonitored. In this regard, PMSCs may pose a risk to the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of AU Member States, and to the social and economic development of civilian populations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me also point out that the earlier discussions about PMSCs in the 1950s and 1960s was associated with mercenary activities. It is against this background that, in July 1977, in response to the grave threat posed by mercenaries, the OAU Heads of State adopted an instrument on the Convention for the Elimination of Mercenaries in Africa, which entered into force in 1985, and paved the way for the criminalisation of the use of mercenaries.

The AU approach to mercenaries and PMSCs is also highlighted in the AU Policy Framework on SSR that provides the AU Member States, RECs and other stakeholders and partners with the necessary guidelines to implement SSR programmes. The AU Policy Framework on SSR discourages the use of private military companies in SSR activities in Africa either by AU Member States, RECs or their international partners. Furthermore, it urges the AU Member States, RECs or their international partners to conform to international, regional and national frameworks regulating the activities of private security companies, when contracting the services of such companies.

The AU also highlights the need for the AU Member States to develop national frameworks that set clear rules for the activities of PMSCs. I am glad to note that some African countries have already started to regulate the use of arms by PMSCs and their interaction with other state institutions within their borders.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust that this conference will allow you to engage in an open dialogue and productive discussions that will lead to a common perspective on the interactions with PMSCs in Africa.

Let me conclude with expressing my sincere gratitude to the Ethiopian Government, and in particular to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia for hosting this conference. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation again to the participating delegations, experts, and national institutions for attending this regional conference.

The African Union Commission is unconditionally committed to the respect for the national sovereignty of Member States, national, regional and continental security, human rights and international humanitarian law. The AU remains grateful to the Swiss Government, ICRC and DCAF for playing a key role in the international efforts to regulate the activities of PMSCs and hope that this will lead to improved peace, security and prosperity to the states and people on the African continent.

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish you fruitful and successful deliberations.