Presentation by Ambassador Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security at the Munich Security Conference Munich, 12-14 February 2016.

“Panel on Africa and the Global Security Order”

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here at the Munich Security Conference and to speak about a subject that is dear to my heart, “Africa and the Global Security Order.”

I want to thank Ambassador Ischinger for his kind invitation and express my gratitude for the continued commitment and dedication to peace and security of the Chair of our Panel, President Obasanjo.

It is a particular privilege to be able to present key challenges for Africa in the global security order, and for the global order concerning Africa, before this distinguished audience.

Africa’s relevance to global security

Africa is not a great power and does not drive geo-strategic power politics. Power is not the reason why Africa is the subject of discussion at this Conference. Africa’s role in the global security agenda has several other elements.

First, Africa has been at the forefront of promoting the norms of collective security and multilateral action. One reason for our concern with collective
security is that African countries are, by global standards, not yet strong enough. Therefore we have vested interests in these international arrangements. Another reason is that many of the security issues facing the world are more clearly evident in Africa before they become apparent elsewhere, and as a result, Africa is compelled to innovate.

Which brings up point number two, Africa’s experiences are relevant to the world at large. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, Africa faced the problem of state collapse and how to respond to it. The continent experimented with diverse policies ranging from military intervention (as in the case of Liberia) to regional containment (as with Somalia), and different forms of reconstruction. These experiences are highly relevant to the situation in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen. There is much that others can learn from our experience.

Another example is terrorism. Al Qaeda came of age in East Africa in the 1990s, and the East African countries responded to this threat, with a combination of police action, military operations, diplomatic efforts and international partnership, that had sufficient efficacy that by the turn of the Millennium, the threat of terrorism in the region had been massively reduced. Sadly, the threat of terrorism has since returned. But the lessons of that earlier success were neither studied nor learned.

And yet another salient case of our role in norm development, is the way in which we recognize context. It is critically important to apply norms, such as the responsibility to protect, within a broader political context that recognizes other equally important norms, such as the need for a negotiated transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. For example in the case of Libya in 2011, the African Union position was that there should be a negotiated transition, not unconditional regime change. Our African position was based on experience of comparable situations in which the popular call for democracy had led to disorder rather than a smooth transition.
A final reason why Africa is relevant to the global security agenda is that Africa's problems are the world's problems. Europe's crisis of refugees and migration cannot be resolved without attending to the situation in African countries, where these migrants originate, or through which they pass. There is no solution to the problem of international terrorism without involving African people, governments and the African Union. The same is true for transnational organized crime including drug trafficking. As climate change accelerates and key natural resources such water, farmland and minerals become scarce and the focus of global competition, Africa becomes a particular focus of attention. No solution to global problems of this kind is possible without Africa.

**Africa’s security challenges and responses**

Africa’s key contemporary security challenges include the following:

- Conflicts over contested transitions, especially unconstitutional changes of government.
- Violent extremism leading to transnational insurgencies that involve terrorist acts.
- Mass distress migration. Most of this is within Africa, but increasingly this issue is a concern for Europe as well.
- Climate change, which impedes economic growth and accentuates demands over resources, with the risk of conflict.
- Accelerated economic development, which has losers as well as winners, for example people who feel they have been unfairly undercompensated for their loss of land or livelihoods.

Africa has developed our own unique institutional arrangements to respond to these challenges.
For those conflicts and security challenges that arise within Africa, we have a complex structure of political, security and economic institutions for handling the tensions and seeking solutions.

Without entering in the details, the key points to note are these ones:

**First**, the African Union has absorbed some key normative developments into the very fabric of its institutions. Prominent among these are the rejection of unconstitutional changes in government and the duty of non-indifference—we cannot stand by idly while a neighbouring country plunges into chaos. This was the lesson we learned from the genocide in Rwanda twenty-two years ago.

**Second**, we have invested heavily in immediate response to crisis. The African Union and the Regional Economic Communities are the first responders to crisis. Within days of a security crisis, we are engaged. The first response is invariably diplomatic, but the AU also invokes coercive measures such as sanctions (for example the suspension of a country where there has been a military takeover), and can deploy troops, with a mandate to undertake enforcement action, very rapidly.

**Third**, we meet—often, at the highest levels, at considerable length. Our leaders meet twice yearly at African Union summits, and numerous other times at meetings at a subregional level, as well as at the United Nations and elsewhere. Our Peace and Security Council—a mechanism that broadly resembles the UN Security Council, which is the principal security organ at the African Union—meets several times a month. Twice a year, at least, it meets at the level of heads of state. There’s a lot of talking, formal and informal. It’s remarkable how the growth of these forums and councils and assemblies has coincided with a decline in armed conflict in our continent. As Winston Churchill said, “jaw jaw is better than war war.”
Fourth, we innovate. We are working towards standard templates for our African Standby Force and other mechanisms. But if you observe in practice how our mechanisms function, you will see that each case of a peace operation is different. Each time we put together a political mission or a peace support operation, it has a different combination of actors, of diplomats and soldiers, and of mandates. So we have African-led mediations, formal and informal, most of them supported politically, logistically and financially by the international community. We have AU-only peace support operations, for example in Somalia where we are fighting the extremist group Al-Shabaab and building the institutions of the new Federal Government of Somalia. We have AU missions that transition to UN peacekeeping operations, which is what occurred in Mali and Central African Republic. We have African enforcement troops inserted into UN missions, such as the Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Africa’s international partnerships

In many discussions in forums such as this, the word ‘partnership’ is a euphemism for African enforcement with European and North American countries footing the bill. To the extent that this arrangement occurs, it is of course unsustainable: the simple fact is that whoever pays the piper calls the tune.

The international cooperation and partnership we seek is of a wholly different kind. Yes it is true that Africa is financially weak and requires external assistance. In this regard, we enormously value the European Union contributions to the African Peace Facility, which are provided with a minimum of conditionalities, and which make possible, for example, the AU Mission in Somalia. We value the other contributions made to African peace operations and political missions. And we hope that our current initiative to make African peace missions eligible for the financial support of UN assessed contributions, is successful—this will make our peace operations more reliable and sustainable.
But a real partnership is different. Take the issue of migration, which is obviously uppermost in the minds of many European policymakers when looking across the Mediterranean Sea. The mass distress migration that is causing such concern in Europe is even more a concern in Africa: the numbers who are on the move within Africa are greater and our capacity to absorb them is lower. But more fundamentally, the problem of this mass migration within Africa and from Africa to Europe can be resolved only by measures within Africa. The issue of migration cannot be solved purely by spending money in Africa: it requires dedicated attention to the root causes of the crisis. Those root causes include failures of political representation, armed conflict, youth unemployment, and lack of educational and other opportunities. We need a true partnership to address these problems in a sustainable manner.

Similar considerations are true for other pressing issues such as terrorism and transnational organized crime. These affect both Africa and the neighboring countries in Europe and the Middle East, but solutions must be found within Africa.

What type of partnership can address these issues? The partnership should begin with shared intellectual leadership: we must jointly define the problems and identify the route to the solutions. The history of Africa shows that if a definition and a policy are imposed from outside, then Africans tend not to buy into the policy, and indeed tend to turn the policy instruments and funds received to other ends. Our discussion must begin with a frank debate about the issue in question, not a negotiation over who will foot the bill and control the implementation.

This observation leads me to my final point, which is the significance of this Munich Security Conference. In particular I want to draw attention to the fact that the ‘Core Group’ of the conference will be meeting in Addis Ababa in two months’ time, on the eve of the Tana Forum. This signals a real interest in Africa, something I of course applaud and value.
But what I particularly value about this forum is precisely that it is not a donor conference or a decision-making meeting. It is a place in which we can explore the key ideas that must inform our joint analysis and policymaking. This is a place in which we can candidly concede that we need fresh ideas and fresh approaches, and that there are problems for which we have no readily-accessible solutions. That is also the raison d’être of the Tana Forum, which over its relatively short five year existence, has already demonstrated the value of an arena in which senior policymakers can speak frankly, off-the-record, and with minimum protocol.

Our era is a time when fresh thinking is needed more than ever, when old formulae have too often proved inadequate to the task at hand. We need to sift through our history, to identify those principles and practices that truly stand the test of time, and those that need to be replaced with something new. Among those established principles that we, as Africans, value particularly, are collective security and multilateralism. Among those we need to revisit and reinvent, are our approaches to unconventional security threats, such as insurgencies involving terrorism, and the tidal wave of humanity pouring forth from the world’s most difficult places, many of them on the African continent.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.