REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION, MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, AT THE CLOSING OF FORUM FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF SOUTH SUDAN PEACE PROCESS

ADDIS ABABA, 21 DECEMBER 2017
Dear Foreign Minister Workneh Gebeyehu,

Dear Facilitators,

Dear participants to this Forum,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The first phase of the IGAD-led Forum for the Revitalization of the South Sudan Peace Process has come to a close.

We welcome the successful conclusion of your deliberations, marked by the signing of an Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access.

I would therefore like to congratulate you for having achieved this potentially decisive milestone.

By signing this Agreement, you have started acknowledging the gravity of the situation, and the fact that it is neither morally nor politically acceptable to allow the ongoing tragedy to continue.

This is a first step, an encouraging first step.

In so doing, you offered a glimmer of hope to your people. Their cries of distress and suffering seem finally to have been heard.

But this remains nonetheless a small first step. The responsibilities bestowed upon the African Union when it comes to protecting Africans and the frankness that should guide my address compel me to say so bluntly.

The real test of your commitment will be demonstrated by your concrete action to translate into reality the commitments made.

Concrete action to stop the fighting, the offensives and counter-offensives that have killed so many innocent civilians, plunged into mourning so many South Sudanese families, and done so much damage, as well as to cooperate with the IGAD monitors and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.
Concrete action to ensure the protection of your people, who, over the past four years, have been deliberately targeted and victimized. This must stop, and stop now.

Concrete action to protect the humanitarian agencies and their staff. This is all the more urgent as more than half of the population is in need of assistance. It is therefore imperative that all the hurdles that hinder their operations are removed.

This will be the real test of your commitment.

This will be the proof that today’s Agreement is indeed a turning point and not just another piece of paper to be added to the long list of commitments that have tragically remained unfulfilled.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Even if implemented, the Agreement is only one of the many elements needed in the road towards building peace and bringing about a lasting solution to the conflict.

It is now important to expedite the process, to hasten the pace, to achieve a sustainable and inclusive political settlement, a settlement that serves as a basis for genuine reconciliation, a settlement that demonstrates that you place the interests of your country above any other consideration, a settlement that will enable South Sudan to realize its potential and allow its people to finally enjoy the fruits of their hard-won independence.

To achieve this goal, you need to show greater political will, demonstrate a deeper commitment to peace, and overcome the current hatred and divisions. In short, you must act as South Sudanese solely driven by the interests of your country and people.

In this journey, you will not walk alone. You can count on the African Union to accompany you.

I cannot conclude without reiterating our appreciation to IGAD and to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. His commitment and that of the other Heads of State and Government of the region have been remarkable. This is additional
proof of the region's high sense of responsibility and of its determination to do everything in its power to make peace a reality in South Sudan.

IGAD's leadership in the coming phase will be critical, as many challenges lie ahead. The African Union will remain firmly on your side, and I call on all international partners to continue to support your efforts.

Lastly, I would like to express our gratitude to the Facilitators - former Ministers George Chicoti, Hanna Tettey and Ramtane Lamamra - as well as to IGAD Special Envoy Ismael Wais. Your experience, skills and commitment to the cause of peace in Africa will prove invaluable as we continue to assist the South Sudanese to close this painful chapter of their history.

Thank you.