STRATEGIC REVIEW WORKSHOP ON
THE AU BORDER PROGRAMME (AUBP)
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
25 – 27 OCTOBER 2023

OPENING REMARKS OF DR. ALHAJI SARJOH BAH,
DIRECTOR OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning,

On behalf of Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, I would like to welcome you to Addis Ababa.

Our gathering today underscores the continued relevance of the AUBP in the pursuit of peace, security, and prosperity across Africa. Our continent, with its unparalleled potential and resilience, has regrettably been marked by conflicts that continue to disrupt lives, hinder development, and undermine our collective progress. In this context, the AUBP remains indispensable in many respects.

From playing a pivotal role in preventing and resolving border-related issues to facilitating the removal of obstacles that impede the free movement of goods, services and people among many others, the AUBP empowers our member states to exercise their authority over their territories, while encouraging them to work together on common challenges such as terrorism, and cross-border crimes through dialogue, cooperation, and diplomacy. This undoubtedly aligns with the goals of Agenda 2063, ensuring that Africa is prosperous, integrated and peaceful.

Since 2007, there has been a significant level of interest and ownership demonstrated by Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the African Union Border Programme (AUBP). The member states have collaborated in the intricate and resource-intensive task of delineating inter-state boundaries and establishing mechanisms for peaceful engagement to handle difficulties collectively. Remarkable progress has been witnessed in the establishment of national border commissions and the development of national and regional border policies in this regard. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in the proliferation of cross-border cooperation efforts to promote sustainable development in border regions.

However, despite our diligent endeavours and the commendable outcomes attained in the execution of the Programme, we acknowledge the ever-evolving nature of border-related challenges requiring more robust and coordinated responses across the continent. This speaks to the necessity to readjust the strategic priorities of the Programme to augment its contributions to Agenda 2063. In addition to the evolving challenges, institutional adjustments within the AU and the adoption of key initiatives also require a reconsideration of the strategic priorities of the AUBP. The adoption of the AU Convention on Cross Border Cooperation in 2014, the Protocol Establishing the Free Movement of Persons and Goods in 2018, and the African Continental Free Trade Area in the same year by the AU Heads of State and Government will, for instance, have major implications on how African States govern their borders and envisage cooperation with their neighbours to attain Agenda 2063.

The merger of the Department of Peace and Security – where AUBP was located – and the Department of Political Affairs as part of the institutional reform of the Commission also calls for a consideration of the strategic priorities and modalities for driving the AUBP. Although AUBP was overlooked in the new structure, it continues to mobilize and engage with RECs, and Member
States from the Conflict Management Directorate. The Adoption of the AU Strategy for Better Integrated Border Governance by the AU Heads of State and Government in 2020 further underscores the commitment of African States to place borders at the heart of public policies.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have an opportunity to critically evaluate the fitness for purpose of the AUBP. This is linked to its capacity to prioritize peaceful dispute resolution, the sufficiency of financial and human resources essential to ensure the AUBP can fulfil its mission, the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including member states, civil society, local communities, and international partners, the positioning of regular evaluation and accountability mechanisms to measure the program's effectiveness and learn from experiences and the extent to which technology can be harnessed to improve border security, trade facilitation, and information-sharing among others.

We must also acknowledge the evolution of border governance in Africa to safeguard the impact of interventions. Change, in the form of the adoption of border policies and legal frameworks, the launch of trade and migration programmes, the introduction of cross-border security mechanisms, etc. results in the introduction of "new" border actors or "new" processes which alter our engagement in border governance. Hence, to acknowledge the evolution in border governance means to adjust our interventions - to adjust how the AUBP is implemented.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We need to assess the Programme and define its strategic orientations to avoid duplication and strengthen coordination, as per the principle of subsidiarity and the comparative advantages of each stakeholder present. We therefore need to consider:

i. What have been the successes, achievements, bottlenecks, and challenges to the implementation of the Programme?

ii. How can we reinforce the coordination function of AUBP at national, regional, and continental levels?

iii. To what extent should the changes in the political, policy, and institutional domains alter the strategic orientations of the Programme?

iv. How can we establish predictable and sustainable funding for the AUBP?

I know I can count on the expertise of those gathered here to guide us on how best to re-conceptualize the AUBP so that it is fit for purpose. Thank you, once again, for accepting our invitation to this important workshop. I am confident we will be able to succeed. I wish you fruitful and productive deliberations.

Thank you.