Excellency Dr. Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, former Vice President of Uganda, and Chairperson of the Panel of the Wise,
Excellency, Hifikepunye Pohamba, former President of the Republic of Namibia,
Distinguished Members of the Panel,
Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Djibouti for the 20th Statutory meeting of the African Union Panel of the Wise. Allow me to also welcome you to what promises to be a very interesting 10th High Level Retreat on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa. As you are aware, this year’s theme is Security Sector Governance in Africa, and how we can leverage it to make the peace we broker more sustainable and societies more resilient to conflicts and crises.
Since our last meeting in Accra, Africa has made significant progress in the prevention of conflicts through the early detection of threats and the deployment of preventive diplomacy by the African Union, Regional Communities and its member States.

However, certain threats persist, hampering the creation of a peaceful and prosperous Africa. Most concerning of these threats is the increase in communal violence that stems from tensions between farmers and herders; divisions along ethnic and religious lines; contested electoral processes and outcomes; and the rise in transnational organized crime, including those related to migration.

**Your Excellencies**, over the years, structural vulnerabilities have aggravated conflict dynamics with dire implications for peace and security, deepening grievances and feelings of marginalization. This is especially worrisome in post-conflict countries, which are more likely to experience a re-emergence of conflict unless these vulnerabilities are addressed swiftly and appropriately.

The inflow of refugees and increase of Internally Displaced Persons in States that are already struggling to provide basic services is also another dimension that puts a strain on the social fabric of society. We have seen this manifest as increasingly violent expressions of anti-migrant sentiments, which have resulted in loss of both life and property.
Increasingly, political transitions have become a key source of conflict in many Member States where electoral processes are being manipulated, and Constitutionalism and rule of law are under threat, most alarmingly from their very custodians. The situations in, Malawi, Cameroon and most recently Mozambique are a cause for concern. As a conflict prevention actor, we should also be more engaged in Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Somalia and Burkina Faso. We should also be working tirelessly to help consolidate the gains made towards lasting peace in countries like the Central African Republic, Sudan and South Sudan.

In States such as Chad and Cameroon, the proliferation of armed groups and the increasing linkage with extremist groups has added a layer of complexity that calls for innovative solutions. The internationalization of internal conflicts in countries like the DRC, Libya and Sudan, and the resultant increased tensions between Member States continue to preoccupy us.

The proliferation of armed and militia groups and their linkages with extremist groups continue to undermine our efforts at promoting and consolidating Rule of Law across the continent. Given the increased, visible disenchantment among our youth, the need for sustained dialogue and support to the implementation of peace accords has never been greater.
We need to do more to foster dialogue between farmers and cattle-herders to improve relations and therefore prevent escalation of communal conflicts. Overall, this requires providing more concerted support to indigenous conflict resolution initiatives, and making deliberate investment in local peace infrastructures.

Just last week, we were supporting the Ethiopian Mothers for Peace, a group of women who engage students and young people across the country, spreading the peace message and bridging ethnic and other divisions. This is an innovative, effective and efficient indigenous conflict resolution approach that should be documented, supported, lauded and replicated.

Your Excellencies, this year I am excited to share the annual update on the status of implementation of our programme of work. It has been a busy year, especially in our efforts to operationalize FemWise-Africa and revitalize PanWise. I am happy with the progress we have made, and look forward to doing more in the year ahead.

I thank you