STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN SOMALIA
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1. At its 4th meeting held in Nairobi on 28 and 29 November 2008, the Panel of the Wise of the African Union (AU) carried out a comprehensive review of the situation in Somalia. The Panel was briefed on the situation in that country and consulted with Somali stakeholders, namely the Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Nur Hussein ‘Adde’, and the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), Honourable Sharif Hassan Sheik Aden.

2. The Somali leaders updated the Panel members on the prevailing situation in their country and on the efforts they are making in order to bring to a definite end the conflict and violence that have been tearing Somalia apart for nearly two decades. They expressed appreciation for the support rendered by the AU, in particular through the deployment of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). At the same time, they made an urgent appeal to the international community, including the United Nations Security Council, to take the necessary steps to avoid a security vacuum, as such a vacuum will undermine the efforts exerted to date and reverse the hard-won gains towards peace and reconciliation in Somalia.

3. On its part, the Panel, while noting the steps taken by the Somali parties since the signing of the Djibouti Agreement, on 19 August 2008, including the signing of the Agreement of 26 October 2008 on the Modalities for the Implementation of the Cessation of Armed Confrontation between the TFG and the ARS and the decisions reached on 25 November 2008 by the High-Level Committee provided for by the Djibouti Agreement, expressed deep concern at the prevailing violence on the ground and the suffering inflicted on the civilian population in Somalia. The Panel also expressed concern at the increasing acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia, which, in fact, are the consequences of the prevailing insecurity and instability in the country and the lack of functioning State structures.

4. In this context, and at a time when the suffering of the Somali people has reached an unprecedented scale, the Panel is of the strong view that the Somali leaders should imperatively transcend the internecine political struggles and divisions that are currently consuming their energy. The Panel called on all the Somali parties that have not yet done so to join the peace and reconciliation process and demonstrate the much needed spirit of accommodation and tolerance in order to end the suffering of their people and open a new chapter in the history of their country.

5. The Panel welcomed the renewed determination of the IGAD countries, in cooperation with the AU and the United Nations, to take the steps required to effectively address the situation. In this respect, the Panel expressed support for the communiqués issued by the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government and Council of Ministers, at their meetings held in Nairobi and Addis Ababa on 29 October and 18 November 2008, respectively.
6. The Panel was informed of the decision of the Ethiopian Government to withdraw its forces from Somalia, as part of the implementation of the Djibouti Agreement of 19 August 2008. The Panel took note of this decision, and expressed appreciation for the contribution of Ethiopia to the peace and reconciliation process in Somalia.

7. Against this background, and in order to avoid a security vacuum that would compound the situation on the ground and seriously undermine the efforts towards lasting peace and reconciliation, the Panel strongly urged the United Nations Security Council to fully assume its responsibilities, in particular by authorizing without any further delay the establishment of an international stabilization force which will build on an enhanced AMISOM and further the cause of peace, security and reconciliation in Somalia, as well as facilitate the urgent deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation that would take over from AMISOM and support the long-term stabilization and reconstruction of Somalia.

8. At the same time, the Panel noted with concern that nearly two years after the adoption by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the decision authorizing the deployment of AMISOM, the Mission is yet to reach its authorized strength. The Panel appealed to AU Member States to fully assume their responsibilities, in the spirit of African solidarity, in particular by urgently providing troops. The Panel also urged the AU partners to provide the much-needed financial and logistical support to AMISOM.

9. The Panel called on the international community as a whole to be mindful of the need for and to resolutely commit itself to the promotion of a comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict in Somalia, the persistence and escalation of which constitute a serious impediment to Africa’s efforts to promote peace, security and integration, as well as a serious threat to international peace and security. In this respect, the Panel noted that, today, there are few countries in the world where there is such an acute need to translate into actions the much heralded principle of the responsibility to protect than in Somalia.

Nairobi, 29 November 2008