CLOSING STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSIONER PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE AU COMMISSION

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TO THE 3rd RETREAT OF THE PAN-AFRICAN NETWORK OF THE WISE (PanWise)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

16-17 November 2015
Your Excellences,
Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen

We have come to the end of our 3rd Retreat of the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise) here at AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa.

I would like to thank each and everyone of you most sincerely for having joined us in this Retreat: colleagues from the Regional Economic Communities, the United Nations; ambassadors; members of the Clergy, academics, researchers, civil society organisations and friends. I would like to thank very specifically ACCORD for supporting us in the hosting of this Retreat.

In my opening words I noted the particular importance of this 3rd Retreat of PanWise. Indeed, this Retreat was convened under the theme “Silencing the Guns by 2020: The Pan African Network of the Wise and the Promotion of Cultures of Peace in Africa” to continue the deliberations and reflections we started since the formal launch of PanWise in 2013. Our mandate is clear – the backdrop of the Solemn Declaration adopted by the African Heads of State and Government on 26 May 2013, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU, continues to inform, indeed inspire our actions. It is always worth repeating our Heads of State and Government pledge: "not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans, and to undertake to end all wars in Africa by 2020".

Dear friends,

2020 is a mere four years away. We must therefore work fast, decisively, with renewed determination to address the scourge of conflict and insecurity, and tirelessly work for our “Pax Africana”. We all agree that “Silencing the Guns” is a key pre-condition for sustainable development and that, while our progress in this regard is to be commended, we have some way to achieving our vision. Our twin efforts (the promotion of peace and the promotion of sustainable development) must continue to be pursued hand in hand.

In these efforts, PanWise must continue – indeed strengthen its efforts – to realise its mission as it represents an important step forward with particular regard to preventive diplomacy, including conciliation, dialogue and mediation efforts. While these processes may increase the likelihood of sustainable peace – when conducted in a participatory, inclusive manner which begins to address both structural as well as dynamic sources of conflict – collaboration and engagement in complementary efforts at the continental, sub-regional and national/local levels are key.
This Retreat considered practical ways to establish these vertical connections through PanWise, acknowledging national and sub-national level actors as key drivers and complementary mechanisms of a culture of peace, conflict prevention and mediation. In order to promote, operationalize and expand PanWise we need to establish, strengthen and network national and sub-national “peace infrastructures”. In this respect, yesterday’s discussion of vulnerabilities and early warning as well as the opportunities and limits of harmonization and coordination of conflict prevention and mediation by the continent’s regional and sub-regional organizations provided us with important contributions that will enable us to better chart our way forward.

The role of PanWise members with regards to concrete interventions, from preventing electoral disputes to sustaining engagement by stakeholders in peace processes, from promoting cross border reconciliation to assisting in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, is crucial. Indeed, we take careful note of your recommendations regarding a reconsideration of peacebuilding, in fact an acknowledgment that peace processes and peace itself require sustained engagement that goes far beyond the signature of a peace agreement.

No less important, we discussed the multiple roles of national and local actors in conflict prevention, dialogue, conciliation and mediation and how best to learn from them. Discussions further emphasised the need to reflect on religious, traditional and home grown conflict management practices – these have the potential to strengthen social cohesion and support democratic participation, legitimacy and encourage solidarity. We have also emphasised the critical roles and engagement of youth and women in conflict prevention, peace making and reconciliation. The engagement of women and the youth is indeed crucial – we must look more closely at the structural issues that prevent this involvement, as well how best to include, involve the youth in our efforts for a more peaceful and secure continent. We have noted your call for a consideration of the judiciary as potentially a key dimension of conflict prevention and management, and acknowledged the key role that Ombudsmen have at national and local levels in our Member States.

This Retreat has also been marked by inspirational and deep reflections on our responsibilities towards the maintenance of peace and security for all in Africa. Former Heads of State and Government, Members of the AU Panel of the Wise, Friends of the Panel, COMESA’s Committee of Elders, SADC Mediation Reference Group, high level representatives of the Church and civil society have shared, openly and honestly, their experiences, concerns and advice. It is indeed refreshing to witness such openness and frankness in the consideration of our current challenges, with specific consideration of current situations in Burundi, CAR, South Sudan, as well as on the violent extremist threat on our continent. Your wise words remind us of the importance of considering peace as a
holistic concept, in the furtherance of which we must intervene at multiple levels, from the political to the social, from the economic to the cultural. Your reflections on the role of PanWise, and within it the role of local, national and regional actors are sure to take our common agenda further.

Dear friends,

We should congratulate ourselves for having been productive and imaginative. The 3rd Retreat of PanWise has yielded three very practical outcomes that will help us achieving our common vision of “Silencing the Guns” by 2020.

- Firstly, we have collectively achieved a deeper understanding of the value of establishing complementarity between mediators and their efforts at different levels and discussed some very practical steps into that direction that will recognise and respects national cultural differences;
- PanWise has strengthened its specific contribution to the promotion of a culture of peace in African in line with the Charter for the African Renaissance and the African Union’s Agenda 2063;
- The role of PanWise in supporting, nurturing and developing National Infrastructures for Peace has been reflected upon and the role of national and local actors in PanWise discussed.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my sincere belief that this Retreat has given us the right opportunity to reflect on our experiences and draw lessons that will allow us to strengthen our efforts in “Silencing the Guns” and promoting a culture of peace on our continent through the operationalization and expansion of the Pan-African Network of the Wise.

I declare this meeting closed and wish you all safe travels back home.