COMMUNIQUE OF THE 8TH MEETING OF THE PANEL OF THE WISE
OF THE AFRICAN UNION

The Panel of the Wise of the African Union (AU) held its eighth meeting in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on 21 May 2010. The opening session was graced by the presence of their Excellencies Mr. Alexis Thambwe-Mwamba, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ms. Marie Ange Lukiana, Minister of Gender, Family and Children of the DRC. Statements were made by H.E. Mr. Miguel Trovoada, who chaired the meeting of the Panel, as well as by Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union. All participants expressed their deep sympathy to the Chairperson of the Panel of the Wise, Mr. Ahmed Ben Bella, for the loss of his wife.

The Panel formally handed over the Flame of Peace to the Congolese Government, and reviewed the conflict situations in Southern Africa, the Great Lakes region, as well as in West and Central Africa. In addition, the Panel considered the conclusions and adopted the recommendations of the Experts’ Workshop held in Kinshasa on 19 and 20 May 2010 on the Issue of Women and Children in Armed Conflict. Finally, the Panel discussed its work programme for 2010.

The review of the state of peace and security in Africa has revealed a generally contrasting situation. In this regard, the Panel noted with concern the continued political crisis in Madagascar, despite the sustained efforts of the international community under the leadership of the AU and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). It expressed its support to President Joachim Chissano, the SADC Mediator, for his efforts to promote a consensual way out of the crisis, as well as to the Commission of the African Union for its own efforts.

The Panel of the Wise was briefed on the developments in the Comoros and AU’s efforts. It urged the Government and the opposition to complete the institutional dialogue they have initiated to promote the consensual implementation of the constitutional reform and harmonization of the electoral calendar across the Union and the islands.

The Panel welcomed the positive developments in the security and humanitarian situation in the countries of the Great Lakes Region. Burundi continues to consolidate its peace process through the holding of its 2nd democratic elections and the ongoing deepening of national reconciliation efforts. The Panel commended the DRC authorities for the efforts they have made towards the consolidation of the peace and national reconciliation processes, as well as for their significant contribution to restoring confidence.
among the countries of the Great Lakes and in the relaunching and ongoing strengthening of existing relationships and regional cooperation. The Panel condemned the continued presence of negative forces in the eastern part of the country, as well as the events that recently took place in the Equator Province. The Panel assured the DRC authorities of its firm support in their efforts to implement the Nairobi Accord as well as the Goma Commitments and Agreements. Finally, the Panel welcomed the dispatching of the multidisciplinary mission by the AU to the DRC and Burundi, within the framework of peace building and post-conflict reconstruction efforts in both countries. The Panel urged the AU Commission to monitor the implementation of the conclusions of the report once they have been endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC).

The Panel of the Wise deplored the fact that, despite the efforts of the AU, through the remarkable work accomplished by AMISOM on the ground, the situation in Somalia continues to be of concern to Africa and the international community as a whole. The Panel commended Uganda and Burundi for their invaluable contribution to the ongoing efforts towards restoring peace, security and stability in Somalia, and requested the AU Commission to continue its efforts with Member States for the enhancement of the capacity of AMISOM, as well as with the United Nations, for it to be more greatly involved in the peace, stabilization and reconstruction processes in Somalia.

The Panel of the Wise welcomed the developments in Sudan, and the prospect of the resumption of negotiations in Doha. In this regard, the Panel urged the parties to conduct genuine negotiations, to conclude a political agreement that is likely to advance the peace process in Darfur. The Panel also welcomed the recent elections which took place in Sudan within the framework of the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and requested the parties involved with the referendum scheduled in Southern Sudan in January 2011, to exercise responsibility by upholding the higher interests of their people in the perspective of the peaceful and democratic transformation of Sudan. The Panel also thanked the AU Commission and the High Level Panel for their efforts to restore peace, security and stability in Sudan, and urged them to continue with their efforts so that the relevant issues relating to the pre and post-referendum periods are satisfactorily addressed.

The Panel expressed appreciation to the parties in the Central African Republic involved in the peace-building process for the compromise they have reached to postpone to a later date the holding of the elections by consensus. The Panel expressed its appreciation to the AU Commission for opening an office in Bangui and for appointing a woman as the Head of the Office and as the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission. The Panel invited the Independent Electoral Commission to intensify its efforts to create the necessary conditions for the holding of free and fair elections, and encouraged the international partners to make sufficient contributions towards their preparation.

The Panel of the Wise noted that the region of West Africa is also making encouraging progress. Liberia and Sierra Leone continue to consolidate peace, democracy, and foster reconstruction and economic development. In contrast, Guinea-Bissau has experienced continuous political turmoil, despite holding democratic elections in 2009. The
Panel requested the AU Commission to continue to support the Guinea Bissau authorities in their efforts to strengthen their institutions; restructure their army and security services; and fight against drug trafficking. The Panel also noted with regret the delay in the process for a way out of the crisis through the organization of general elections in Côte d'Ivoire. However, the Panel welcomed the easing of the current political tension, which will contribute to the relaunching of the electoral process. In this regard, the Panel urged the Ivoirian parties to implement, in good faith, the Ouagadougou Political Agreement in order to finally bring the country out of the long crisis which has threatened its development.

The process of ending the crisis in the Republic of Guinea has gained momentum, since the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement on 15 January 2010. The Panel of the Wise commended the parties to the transition process, and invited them to work towards the holding of the presidential elections scheduled for 27 June 2010, in a peaceful climate conducive to a lasting solution.

The long-standing political, social and institutional crisis experienced by Niger now has good prospects for a resolution. The new de facto authorities of the country have formalized their commitment to restore constitutional order by the holding of democratic elections. The Panel commended the AU Commission for appointing a Special Envoy to accompany, alongside ECOWAS, the process of ending the crisis. The Panel urged the parties in Niger to maintain the consensus for the early restoration of democracy and for the preparation and organization of free and democratic elections in the shortest time possible.

The Panel of the Wise, an essential pillar of the Peace and Security Architecture of the AU, held its 8th meeting on the eve of the celebration of Africa Day, on 25 May 2010, in the context of increased efforts by the AU Commission and the PSC for the resolution of crises facing the Continent. In this regard, the Panel welcomed the efforts of the Commission to implement the Tripoli Declaration of 31 August 2009 and welcomed the activities undertaken in the context of the Year of Peace and Security in Africa, calling on all African countries to contribute to the achievement of its objectives.

The Panel of the Wise welcomed the success of the Experts’ Workshop on the issue of Women and Children in Armed Conflict, held in Kinshasa on 19 and 20 May 2010. The Panel also welcomed the conclusions reached by the experts. It thanked the AU partners whose contributions made the Workshop a success. The Panel paid tribute to the Congolese authorities, in particular His Excellency Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Republic, for having accepted to host the Workshop of Experts and the 8th meeting of the Panel of the Wise, as well as for the facilities and the conducive working environment created for this purpose.

Kinshasa, 21 May 2010

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