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**Office of the Commissioner for Peace and Security**

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**Commemoration of**

**AFRICA DAY**

**Statement by Ambassador Smail Chergui,**

**Commissioner for Peace and Security**

**25 May 2020**

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear sisters and brothers  
Our followers from all regions of the Continent and the world.  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. Allow me to welcome you all, and express my sincere gratitude for your participation in this commemoration of the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Africa Day under the Theme of “Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development”, the AU’s theme of the year for 2020.
2. As we mark the celebration of Africa Day, let me first pay tribute to our fallen African Heroes and Heroines, who paid the ultimate price in AU Peace Support Missions in pursuit for peace and security in the continent in order to attain the Pan African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. As COVID19 pandemic continues to claim a lot of lives in Africa and beyond, I wish to pay tribute to the fallen and to express my condolences to their families and I wish a speedy recovery for those fighting to reclaim their lives from this deadly virus.
3. Today, the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, is an important date in the history of our continent, our founding leaders in this day in 1963 established the Organization of African Unity (OAU), with the ultimate objective of liberating Africa from the yoke of colonialism, racism and apartheid. As you know, in 2002, the OAU was transformed into the current African Union.
4. On this day in 2013, on the occasion of the OAU’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the AU Assembly adopted a Solemn Declaration to among others, not bequeath conflict to the next generation of Africans. Our leaders undertook to end wars in our Continent by 2020 through an inclusive agenda setting out specific objectives and actions.

Your Excellencies and distinguished guests,

5. On 31 January 2015, the African Union Assembly adopted Agenda 2063, a historical, grand, long term plan for our economic and social development, in pursuit of an *integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, that is driven by its own citizens*.
6. Through the adoption of this blueprint for our development, our leaders were issuing a clarion call for us to come together as Africans, and work collectively to build a common future that is free from fear and free from want. They were setting us clearly on the path towards the Africa we want.
7. The subsequent adoption of the AU Master roadmap on Silencing the Guns in 2016, was an important scheme to guide the Continent’s peace and security efforts towards

reaching a conflict-free Africa through mobilization of collaborative actions and initiatives among the AU Policy Organs, the AU Commission in conjunction with the Peace and Security Council, Members States and the Regional Economic Communities and mechanisms. Silencing the guns Agenda has since also received the support of the wider international, in particular the UN Security Council through the adoption of resolution 2457 in 2019.

Excellencies and distinguished guests,

8. As we continue to pursue this path, it is with a sober recognition that the journey is not smooth and without challenges. Today, the reality of instability and conflict are compounded by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the African continent and the world at large.
9. Understandably, the threat posed by COVID-19 has considerably slowed the momentum of the “Silencing the Guns” agenda, and our intention to further accelerate our collective efforts to end wars in Africa.
10. Even if the numbers of infected people are still comparatively low, the continuous spread of the virus has severely affected African countries in various ways. One common issue that is of great concern to us, is how lockdown measures taken to curb the spread of the pandemic, have severely worsened the plight of African women and children, including the internally displaced, and refugees seeking international protection.

Excellencies and distinguished guests,

11. In this demanding environment on peace and security in Africa, terrorist and armed groups failed to heed the calls of the Chairperson of the AU, President Ramaphosa, Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki and the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, for a global ceasefire. This has severely affected humanitarian access to conflict areas and limited the reach of support and relief efforts, exacerbating the dual impact of the conflict and the damage caused by the global pandemic on the most vulnerable. Our people are suffering needlessly.
12. It is therefore critical for the Union and its organs to continue discharging key responsibilities, including concrete steps to fight the global pandemic, whilst also remaining seized with peace and security priorities in the continent as we are doing in Somalia, fostering stabilization, and inclusive, participatory social and regional cohesion, as we are doing in the Sahel for an early deployment of the 3000 troops forces decided the Heads of State and Government to contribute to combat terrorism in the Sahel.
13. We also continue to provide the support needed to guarantee the sustainability of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in South Sudan. Similarly, we remain committed to exploring avenues for inclusive dialogue and

reconciliation among the Libyan stakeholders, while mitigating the consequences of the Libyan crisis on neighbouring countries and Sahel region. Together with the UN, we continue to accompany the transition in Sudan and the CAR. Resolving the conflict in Western Sahara remains also in the priorities of the African Union.

14. We are also upping our efforts to ensure a sustainable regional approach towards attaining and consolidating stability and security in the Sahel, the lake Chad Basin, the Horn of Africa and the Great lakes.
15. Such efforts and collaborations are critical in our quest for durable peace and security on the continent, including our efforts to contain and defeat the COVID-19 pandemic, and limit its negative impact on our efforts to silence the guns in Africa.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests.

16. As we celebrate Africa Day in this challenging environment, let us acknowledge that Covid-19 is not simply a health and economic crisis. It is also, fundamentally, a gendered crisis that threatens the sovereignty of our Member States, and in many ways the fundamental freedoms and human rights of our people. It threatens our way of life, and who we are as Africans.
17. Countries have closed their borders and ceased economic activity, ordering citizens to stay indoors, in an effort to control the spread of the virus. With the widespread closures of schools and universities, the futures of millions of young people, including women, are under threat.
18. The economic downturn in many countries has led to large scale losses of jobs and livelihoods amongst the continent's most productive populations, causing restlessness and suffering, especially among young people, already burdened with the weight of unemployment.
19. The AU estimates that COVID-19 will render 20-million people jobless on the continent – a worrying threat, given the uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation. Unrest in some countries and high-levels of crime are already being witnessed, despite various economic stimulus packages introduced in some cases.
20. Another area that has taken a massive hit is multilateralism, and the related phenomenon of continental integration. It is especially painful for us as we had planned to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area.
21. Despite this unavoidable setback, Africa is deploying all possible efforts to ensure an effective response to the crisis, in recognition that African states cannot address these challenges individually. A strong collective approach based on the principle of solidarity and coordinated through Africa CDC, has given our people a sense of hope even in the height of uncertainty.
22. Also under the spotlight is the question of climate change. It is a certainty that, unless decisive measures are taken to address the issue of climate change, the disruption

caused by human actions to the natural world will lead to more pandemics in the future. Of importance is the imperative to enhance our preparedness and capacity for response.

23. As already alluded to by my sister Semate, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, the impact of Covid-19 on the conduct of elections and the situation of refugees and IDPs across the continent cannot be over emphasized. I would like to commend those of our Member States who have conducted elections, while at the same time battling against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests.

24. Africa is richly endowed with vast human and natural resources which, if harnessed in accordance with our vision, Agenda 2063, will improve the livelihoods of the peoples of Africa, through the rapid eradication of hunger, poverty and disease.
25. The founding fathers of OAU have successfully helped us to recover our dignity. The issues of silencing the guns and the fight against Covid-19, are the challenges of our generation that need to be addressed with collaborative and creative efforts across the entire Continent.
26. As I conclude, allow me to leave you with inspiration from a famous speech delivered in South Africa's Parliament in 2003, by then President, His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, and I quote:

I am an African.

I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa ...

The dismal shame of poverty, suffering and human degradation of my continent is a blight that we share.

The blight on our happiness that derives from this and from our drift to the periphery of the ordering of human affairs leaves us in a persistent shadow of despair.

Whatever the setbacks of the moment, nothing can stop us now! Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace!

However improbable it may sound to the sceptics, Africa will prosper!"

Because,

I am an African!

End of quote.

Long live the African Union

Long live Pan Africanism

May God bless Africa!

I thank you for your kind attention.