AFRICAN UNION WELCOMES PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS ELIMINATING THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY

Addis Ababa, 19 September 2012: As part of the implementation of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army (RCI-LRA), which was authorized by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) in November 2011, the Governments of the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and Uganda have handed over their counter-LRA contingents to the Regional Task Force (RTF) Commander, Col. Dick PritOlum.

Uganda’s Minister of Defence, Dr. CrispusKiyonga, handed over 2,000 soldiers from the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF), while South Sudan’s Deputy Minister, Dr. MajakAgotAtem, handed over 500 from the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in a joint ceremony presided over by the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission for the LRA issue, Ambassador Francisco Madeira, in Yambio town, capital of the Western Equatoria State (WES), South Sudan, on 18 September 2012.

The ceremony was attended by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office in Central Africa (UNOCA), Mr. Abou Moussa; the Force Commander of the UN Mission to the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), Maj-General Moses Obbi; the U.S Ambassador to South Sudan, Susan Page; the European Union (EU) Delegation in South Sudan, represented by Mr. Peter Welling; the Governor of WES, Col Bangasibakasoro; the Chief of Defence Forces of UPDF, Gen.ArondaNyakairima, and the Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations) of SPLA, Lt-Gen.Wislon Deng, together with their Senior Officers; U.S Military Advisors in Nzara (South Sudan); religious leaders and officials of several various humanitarian agencies.

Earlier on 12 September 2012, the Deputy Minister of Defence of the Central African Republic, Col. Jean-Francis Bozizé, accompanied by the Chief of Defence Staff of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), Brig-Gen Guillaume Lapo, had handed over to the RTF Commander 350 soldiers, as part of the battalion of 450 soldiers that CAR intend to contribute to the RTF, within the framework of the RCI-LRA. The ceremony took place at Obo, South-Eastern CAR, and was presided over by the AU Special Envoy on the LRA issue. In the course of his mission to CAR during the week beginning 9 September 2012, the Special
Envoy was also received by President François Bozizé, with whom he discussed the situation in the areas affected by LRA.

The WES Governor expressed happiness that the SPLA had become part of the RTF, adding that his people had suffered LRA atrocities since 2005 and were eager to see an end to this situation. The UPDF Chief of Defence Forces stressed that, since the launch of Operation Lighting Thunder in north-eastern DRC in 2008, the arms in the hands of LRA have significantly reduced, stressing that UPDF and SPLA would continue to fully collaborate to search, combat and soon eliminate LRA remnants from the region.

Uganda’s Minister of Defence saluted the UPDF and SPLA for their commitment to eliminate the LRA and urged for continued support to the on-going military efforts. He thanked the UN, the EU and the US for their support, and appealed for more in terms of food, transport, health care and medical evacuation, uniforms and other logistics, to sustain the counter-LRA operations. On his part, South Sudan’s Deputy Defence Minister called for continued unified action against the LRA and reiterated that the defeat of this criminal group was at hand.

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General hailed the hand-over of the national contingents to the RTF as a major landmark in the operationalization of the RCI-LRA, and pledged the continued support of the UN to the AU-led efforts, through the implementation of the regional strategy against the LRA. He called for effective coordination between the RTF and other stakeholders. The US Ambassador, the EU representative and UNMISS Force Commander also expressed support for the RTF.

Ambassador Madeira saluted the leadership of Uganda, South Sudan and CAR for the steps they have taken towards the implementation of the AU PSC communiqué of 22 November 2011, which authorized the operationalization of the RCI-LRA, with a 5,000 strong force to be contributed by the affected countries. He stressed that the transfer of the command of the national contingents to the RTF marked an important milestone in the operationalization of the Initiative. Ambassador Madeira said the RTF would protect the local populations deemed vulnerable to LRA attacks, track and combat LRA elements and facilitate, where necessary, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. He indicated that consultations were on-going with the DRC Government for the hand-over of their contingent to RTF, so that LRA elements do not re-establish a safe-haven in north-eastern DRC. He expressed optimism that, with a simultaneous multi-pronged approach on both military and non-military fronts in all the affected countries, the LRA could be eliminated soon. He therefore reiterated the earlier appeals for international support for the RTF.

The Chairperson of the Commission welcomes the progress being made by the affected countries towards eliminating the LRA and expresses gratitude to the international partners, particularly the US, EU, UN Missions, Offices and Agencies for their continued support to the RCI-LRA. In this regard, he urges the affected countries to redouble their efforts until the LRA is eliminated, and calls upon the other AU Member States, as well as the international partners, to provide all necessary support for the effective implementation of the RCI-LRA, including the humanitarian, recovery and development needs of the affected areas.