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PRESS RELEASE

THE AFRICAN UNION STRONGLY CONDEMNS THE HOLDING OF A UNILATERAL "REFERENDUM" IN ABYEI

Addis Ababa, 28 October 2013: The Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, is closely following the situation in the Abyei Area. She has learned, with deep concern, of the organization by the leadership of the Ngok Dinka community of a unilateral "referendum", to determine the final status of Abyei.

The Chairperson of the Commission, while understanding the frustrations arising from the fact that the Abyei referendum has not yet been held, as provided for by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), stresses that this unilateral act is unacceptable and irresponsible. She condemns this exercise in the strongest terms possible. This unilateral act is in violation of the relevant decisions of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), and can only heighten tension on the ground and further complicate the search for a mutually acceptable solution within the framework of existing commitments. She calls on those orchestrating this illegal act to put an immediate halt to their actions, as they pose a threat to peace in the Abyei Area, and have the potential to trigger an unprecedented escalation on the ground, which could negatively affect the continuing normalization of relations between Sudan and South Sudan, with far-reaching consequences for the region as a whole. Such escalation could also put the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) peacekeepers in a very dangerous position.

The Chairperson of the Commission acknowledges with appreciation the rejection by the Government of South Sudan of any unilateral action in Abyei. She calls on the international community, including the United Nations, to condemn the ongoing unilateral and irresponsible action in Abyei, and to prevail upon those concerned to cease it immediately.

The Chairperson of the Commission reiterates the AU's position on the issue of Abyei, as contained in relevant PSC communiqués, including AU's acceptance of the Proposal submitted by the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan and South Sudan (AUHIP) on 21 September 2012. As stressed by the PSC, this Proposal represents a fair and balanced solution that takes into account existing commitments and the interests of the communities on the ground. The Chairperson of the Commission also calls for the expeditious implementation of 20 June 2011 Agreement on Temporary Administrative and Security Arrangements for the Abyei Area. In this respect, she welcomes the decisions reached by the Presidents of Sudan and South Sudan during their recent Summit in Juba.

The Chairperson of the Commission further urges the Abyei communities to exercise utmost restraint and give maximum cooperation to UNISFA in order to ensure the maintenance of peace and stability in Abyei. She seizes this opportunity to pay tribute to UNISFA for its commendable efforts, in spite of the challenging environment in which it is operating.

The Chairperson of the Commission looks forward to the forthcoming visit of the PSC to Abyei, and is confident that PSC interactions with all parties concerned can assist in defusing the prevailing tension and facilitate a consensual way out of the crisis, with the support of the AUHIP.