Remarks by

Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra
AU Commissioner for Peace and Security

On the Occasion of the Launch of a

Photo Exhibition
Highlighting the Issues of Humanitarian Access and the Protection of Civilians in Conflict Situations

With a Focus on

Mali and DR Congo

Organized by

OXFAM International

In Collaboration with the

Peace and Security Department
Within the framework of the Make Peace Happen Campaign

Addis Baba, Ethiopia
23 January 2012
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to OXFAM International for organizing this event, to draw attention and raise awareness about the plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees, especially in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Two weeks ago, I undertook a visit to the DRC and Rwanda. During my stay in both countries, I had the privilege to hold consultations with the government authorities, on the situation in the sub-region, especially in the DRC. I also met with the leadership of MONUSCO – the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The visit offered me an opportunity to see for myself, the humanitarian situation and the plight of thousands of persons displaced by the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, particularly in the DRC.

The decision by OXFAM International and the African Union to organize today’s event, highlighting the need for humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, especially in the current conflicts in Mali and the DRC, is timely.

The African Union Commission appreciates and commends the tireless effort of the humanitarian partners and organizations engaged in the protection and assistance of persons displaced by armed conflict.
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The daily suffering and struggles of women and children, in particular who have been traumatized and displaced by armed conflict, should never be forgotten. We must ensure adequate humanitarian access to IDPs and Refugees, and guarantee them the full protection offered by various international instruments. This commitment is a central pillar of the Make Peace Happen Campaign launched by the African Union since 2010.

The AU will continue to work to ensure adequate humanitarian access and the protection of civilians in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere in the Continent.

In that context, allow me to recall that six weeks ago, on 6 December 2012, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, also known as The Kampala Convention, entered into force, thirty days after Swaziland became the 15th AU Member State to deposit its instrument of ratification, in conformity with Article 17 of the Convention.

The objective of the Kampala Convention is to provide a binding regional legal and institutional framework for the prevention of Internal Displacement of Persons and the protection of and assistance to IDPs in Africa.

It outlines the respective obligations and responsibilities of States Parties, armed groups, non-state and other relevant actors, including international organizations
and the African Union, with respect to the prevention of internal displacement and protection of, and assistance, to IDPs.

Allow me to seize this opportunity to thank and congratulate the countries that have ratified the Convention, and to urge the remaining Member States to expedite the process of ratifying this very important document.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission, and also of Dr. Aisha Abdullahi, Commissioner for Political Affairs, whose portfolio includes Humanitarian affairs, allow me to once again express my sincere appreciation for the support that OXFAM International has continued to provide to the AU, as a whole, and the Peace and Security Department, in particular, in various areas, including the Make Peace Happen Campaign.

This fruitful partnership was again demonstrated most recently at the opening ceremony of the on-going African Cup of Nations, during which OXFAM provided critical support to the successful efforts by the African Union and the Confederation of African Football (CAF), to promote peace through sports.

Finally, I wish to commend OXFAM for providing humanitarian relief and support to the people affected by the conflicts in Mali, DRC, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and elsewhere in the Continent.

I now invite you to share the experience of persons displaced by armed conflict, through photography.
Thank you for your kind attention.