OPENING ADDRESS BY AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI,
COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY,
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TO THE 5th AU ANNUAL RETREAT OF SPECIAL ENVOYS AND MEDIATORS
Arusha, Tanzania,
21 October 2013
Dr. Mohammed Gharib Bilal, Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania,
Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms,
Representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, La Francophonie and bilateral partners,
Former Presidents, Special Representatives and Heads of AU Liaison Offices,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my immense pleasure, on behalf of Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as well as on my own behalf, to welcome you to the African Union’s 5th Annual Retreat of Special Envoys, Representatives and Mediators. Unfortunately, Chairperson Dlamini-Zuma could not be here with us, due to other pressing commitments. Indeed, as we gather in Arusha, the Chairperson is undertaking a visit to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the three West-African countries hardest hit by the Ebola virus, to express the continent’s solidarity with the affected populations and to contribute to a greater international mobilization in order to effectively address the challenges of this epidemic.

The AU’s sincere gratitude goes first and foremost to the Government of Tanzania for hosting us and welcoming us with such warm hospitality. We thank President Jakaya Kikwete, his Government and the people of Tanzania for their strong commitment to the African Union’s vision of a strong, prosperous and united continent. I would like in particular to acknowledge Tanzania’s outstanding contribution to both the liberation of Africa from the yoke of colonialism and racial discrimination and to the promotion of peace, security and stability.

Allow me also to thank all of you for taking time of your extremely busy schedule to attend this Retreat. In this regard, I would like to pay special tribute to our colleagues from the United Nations, including the Chief of Staff of the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose presence here is a testimony to the strong partnership between the AU and the UN in the pursuit of peace, security and stability on the continent. We are equally indebted to the European Union, La Francophonie, the League of Arab States and the bilateral partners, as well as to the experts and civil society representatives for converging in Arusha for this Retreat.
Finally, let me extend our warmest appreciation to ACCORD and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) for their invaluable support in the planning and convening of these Retreat.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This Retreat is convened under the theme “Silencing the Guns – Owning the Future” to continue our deliberations started at the Commission’s High-Level retreat held in Durban last April. It is our expectation that this Retreat will take the Durban deliberations forward, and assist in developing a detailed Roadmap towards a conflict free Africa and in these manner to contribute to the goals of agenda 2063.

We are meeting here against the backdrop of the Solemn Declaration adopted by the African Heads of State and Government on 26 May 2013, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU. In that Declaration, the Heads of State and Government expressed their

“... determination to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa, to make peace a reality for all our people, and to rid the continent of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters, and violent conflicts, and to prevent genocide”. They “pledge(d) not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans, and to undertake to end all wars in Africa by 2020”.

That this is an ambitious goal hardly needs to be emphasised. Indeed, 2020 is a mere five years away. The deadline set by the Heads of State and Government to achieve such an important, yet seemingly impossible task, was chosen for a particular reason. This was not an arbitrary choice of a date in the future, but indeed a warning to all of us that if Africa is to seize the opportunities of the present and chart a better future for its people, it must decisively address the scourge of conflict and insecurity.

But there is something else in this Declaration that should continuously remind us as Africans of the urgency of the task, sharpen our resolve and give us the strength to strive for what is undoubtedly a challenging endeavour. Indeed, in their Declaration, the African Leaders made a promise not to themselves, not to the international community, but to the next generation of Africans, to whom they pledged not to bequeath the burden of conflicts.

And a pledge is an assurance, a guarantee, indeed a solemn promise. And that the Promisees, the millions of young, vibrant, creative, entrepreneurial, better informed and educated Africans will one day hold the leaders, and indeed all of us, to this very promise. What Continent did we leave them? What Continent are we creating so that they can flourish to their maximum potential?
Ladies and gentlemen,

Silencing the Guns is a key condition for sustainable development on the continent. The saying that there is no development without peace remains as true as ever.

We have made progress in our efforts to nurture homegrown, sustainable, participatory and inclusive development, one that includes and indeed stems from our youth, from our women, from our individual entrepreneurs, from African medium and small size enterprises, from strong African private sector operators. The promotion of sustainable development must continue at the centre of our action as the African Union.

True to the 50th Anniversary Declaration and the African Union’s 2063 Vision, we are gradually but surely supporting a turning of the tide – a tide that will take us away from poverty, underdevelopment, destitution, desperation, inequality. A tide that will see our Members implement their commitments, take seriously issues of governance and accountability, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – in a word, respect for dignity.

Our Union is today known for its commitment, in words but primarily in action, to a sustainable, economic progressive, and strong African continent. An African continent that is true to its roots and yet globally connected; that respects its values and fundamental resource: our people. An Africa that must learn and build on its current growth to engender broad based and sustainable development, realizing that this is an opportunity of a life time, Africa’s opportunity.

You may recall the strong call made by the Peace and Security Council members to our Heads of States and Government on 24 April 2014: To “deepen the culture of democracy, accountability and good governance” and ”sign, ratify and domesticate existing AU legal frame works and normative instruments” with a view to promoting durable peace and security

These efforts will not succeed without the minimum condition of peace, which, you would agree, is the end of violence. We have to make violent conflict in Africa a thing of the past.

Dear colleagues,

“Silencing the Guns – Owning the Future” is therefore our theme in this 5th Retreat held here in Arusha. Because of the complexity of the task at hand, we have once again called upon your experience, expertise, knowledge and commitment.
Dear friends, our yearly Retreats have also become an excellent opportunity for contact, exchange and networking. At every year’s Retreat, starting with our first three Retreats held in Cairo in August 2010, September 2011 and November 2012, as well as our last Retreat, held in Abidjan in October last year, we strengthen our interactions, reflect together, develop action plans. Indeed, these Retreats have become an increasingly important event in our respective yearly calendars.

And yet, because of our specific theme, this year’s Retreat carries perhaps a more pressing and urgent demand. Indeed, we are specifically tasked with taking forward with concrete and realistic proposals the “Draft Constitutive Elements of the African Roadmap for Silencing the Guns in Africa” adopted in Durban in June last. Our task here is clear: to debate and reflect in order to give a concrete operational dimension to our draft Roadmap, particularly as regards Strategies for Action.

It is therefore important that we recall the key indicative elements of our draft Roadmap for Silencing Guns in Africa, for each one of these elements must be discussed and given appropriate time and attention. In our Roadmap, we acknowledged that poor governance, inequality, poverty, political and ethnic exclusion, subversion of national constitutions, violations of human rights, extremist ideologies, illiteracy and unemployment are key causes of conflict.

The Roadmap indicates a number of strategies to address some of these causes and triggers of violent conflicts – and here I must stress the importance of focusing on:

(i) illicit flow of arms and arms proliferation;
(ii) promotion of reconciliation, social cohesion and harmony;
(iii) promotion of good governance, including in the defence and security sectors;
(iv) regulation of extraction of natural resources in Africa;
(v) illicit financial flows from Africa;
(vi) strengthening partnerships for peace and development;
(vii) deficits in implementation of policies and legal and normative frameworks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the past decade, the African Union has developed a framework for conflict prevention, management and resolution – a framework needed if the 2020 goal is to be achieved. Based on our vision, this framework is informed by the principle of non-indifference; popular participation in activities of the Union; responsiveness of
Member States to the rights and needs of their citizens; leadership and ownership of the continent.

To this end, the AU has developed substantive capacity that includes institutions, instruments and protocols such as those informing the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The critical role of our Assembly, of the Peace and Security Council, of the Commission, as well as the preventive diplomacy activities of the Panel of the Wise continue to require the support of Member States and the larger international community.

Furthermore, our efforts in this respect are guided by the principle of complementarity between the African Union and the RECs: the RECs should expect the African Union to provide coordination and strategic guidance on conflict prevention and mediation at the continental level.

But the African Peace and Security Architecture does not only require coordination and harmonization of peace and security related activities between the African Union and the RECs. It also requires the support of civil society and academia. In our thrust to build a Union of the African people, we need to strengthen collaboration and partnerships with civil society and academia, and explore ways of cooperation and collaboration.

In addition, an important task to be addressed at all levels – continental, regional and national – is to mainstream and embed the role of women in peace and security through the implementation of instruments dealing with their role, and supporting the development of national action plans in that regard. Moreover, we must enhance the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation in Africa.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The next three days have been planned to enable frank and open discussions as well as concrete contributions on all these issues. You will see from your programme that we have allowed for plenary sessions as well as working group sessions.

Starting with a horizon scanning session, where we will reflect on the position of Africa in 2014 and focus on future trends, we will devote some time to reflecting on existing drivers of conflict and instability on our Continent. In this respect, we will focus on the triggers of violence, anticipation and responses to instability (focusing on organised crime, extremism, and illicit traffic), as well as mitigation of environment degradation and climate change. These presentations will set the scene for what to me are the most important sessions of the entire Retreat: the break-out sessions where we will be tasked with taking the Durban Roadmap further in light of discussions and reflections held in the first two days.
It is my sincere hope that this Retreat will give us an opportunity to reflect on our experiences and draw lessons that will allow us to strengthen our efforts in “Silencing the Guns” on our continent.

I declare this Retreat open and thank you.