SECURITY SECTOR REFORM (SSR) AND DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR) PLANNING WORKSHOP FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF GUINEA BISSAU

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OPENING STATEMENT BY

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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
Honorable Minister of Defense, Dr. Eduardo Costa Sanha,

Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission in Guinea Bissau, Amb Ovideo Pequeno,

Brigadier General Political and Defense and National coordinator on SSR, Malla Camara

Distinguished participants

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude and that of my team, for the warm welcome extended to us by the Government and people of Guinea Bissau, and the excellent arrangements to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of this important workshop. Let me also thank the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Ambassador Ovidio Pequeno, and the AU Liaison Office here in Bissau, for all the excellent preparation towards the convening of this workshop.

Distinguished participants

Ladies and gentlemen

At the onset, on behalf of the African Union I would like to reaffirm our commitment to assisting the Government and people of Guinea Bissau in resolving the country’s political, economic, security, and social challenges. This commitment is evidenced by the numerous statements of support for Guinea Bissau by the Chairperson of the African Union, H.E. President Idriss Deby Itno of Chad, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E. Madam Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Smail Chergui, and the AU Peace and Security Council. This workshop is part of these African Union efforts to bring peace to this beautiful country.
The workshop is a follow up to the SSR needs assessment mission that was undertaken by the AU and partners in March 2015, and is being held at the request of the Government of Guinea Bissau. The objective of the workshop is to reinforce the capacities of actors and focal points responsible for Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Guinea Bissau. The African Union considers this workshop as crucial, because it is in line with the stabilization efforts that this country is engaged in at the moment, and also complements ongoing political and post conflict reconstruction efforts that the AU is seized with to assist the government and people of Guinea Bissau.

Through this three day workshop, we hope to provide an opportunity for the Government of Guinea Bissau to inform national stakeholders and partners, of the latest developments on the political and security situation in this country. Specifically, we hope that participants will understand the national DDR and SSR priorities identified by the Government of Guinea-Bissau, which will guide all stakeholders in planning the practical steps necessary to bring lasting peace to this country. Central to the AU message is the need to uphold the principle of national ownership, and how to coordinate the vital support being provided by partners already engaged on the ground.

In this regard, the AU recognizes the efforts made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the critical importance of the role being played by ECOMIB in stabilizing the country. The AU also takes note of the initiatives taken by the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) in favor of peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau. The AU further commends the important support that this country is receiving from the United Nations and the European Union. In this regard, I urge all stakeholders not to forget the very elaborate and well-meaning SSR engagement for this
country by the European Union between 2005 and 2010, and the important work done by the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau from 2006 to date. Such a huge investment by the international community should not be allowed to go to waste, and we should draw important lessons learned from these experiences as the country plans the way forward.

**Distinguished participants**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

The African Union is fully aware of the political challenges that this country is facing right now. In this regard, I would like to reiterate the AU’s conviction expressed in the communique of the 586th meeting of the Peace and Security Council held in Addis Ababa on 31 March 2016, that only a genuine and inclusive dialogue, based on the respect of the country’s constitution, will enable the Guinea-Bissau stakeholders to find a consensual solution to the crisis facing this country, and necessary conditions to consolidate peace and stability, and enable post-conflict reconstruction. I therefore encourage all the people of Guinea Bissau and especially the political actors, to exercise utmost restraint, to uphold the country’s interest and engage in an inclusive dialogue to resolve your political differences. This is the only way that the country can achieve peace and stability, and create the right atmosphere for socio-economic development.

As a way forward, I therefore call upon all stakeholders to focus on a united approach for the political, economic, social, and security development of this country. In the area of DDR and SSR that we are focusing on at this workshop, there is need to dovetail these activities together with comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction and recovery efforts which include non-military stabilization activities. This also means that all stakeholders should take part in the stabilization process including all elements of the security sector,
other government departments, the business community, civil society organizations, women’s groups, the youth and people in the Diaspora. It also means that adequate resources such as finance, equipment and skilled manpower must be made available, and appropriate institutions for the implementation of DDR and SSR must be established and supported.

On our part, on behalf of the African Union, I would like to assure you that under the African Union SSR and DDR programs, we will continue to support the government and people of Guinea Bissau through the AU Liaison Office here in Bissau, and we will continue to contribute and stand by your side in the implementation of initiatives geared towards achieving peace, security and stability in Guinea Bissau and indeed in the region as a whole. We look forward to working collaboratively with our partners in finding sustainable solutions to the challenges being faced by Guinea Bissau.

I wish this workshop has successful conclusions, and I look forward to see the priorities that will come from the working groups, and your recommendations on the steps that need to be taken on the way forward.

I thank you all for your attention.