PREPARATORY MEETING OF EXPERTS
FOR THE SIXTEENTH ORDINARY MEETING
OF THE SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
ON DEFENCE, SAFETY AND SECURITY

3 JUNE 2024
NELSON MANDELA HALL, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

OPENING STATEMENT BY DR. ALHAJI SARJOH BAH,
DIRECTOR FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE,
POLITICAL AFFAIRS PEACE AND SECURITY DEPARTMENT
Colonel Haina Bousseif, Chairperson of the Experts Meeting,

Members of the Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security,

Representatives of Member States,

Representatives of Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is with pleasure that I stand before you this morning. I extend a warm welcome to all esteemed Member States of the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), and our International Partners. We are all gathered here, united in our shared responsibility, for the opening session of the preparatory meeting of Experts for the 16th Ordinary Session of the STCDSS and the 19th Ordinary Session of the African Chiefs of Defence Staff and Heads of Safety and Security Services.

I express my deepest appreciation for your presence, which signifies Africa's collective commitment to the advancement of our peace and security agenda. Your participation is not only crucial but also a testament to the unity and resolve we share in facing the challenges ahead. Your expertise and dedication are invaluable in this endeavour.

As we embark on the day's deliberations, let us pause to honour the memory of our African brothers and sisters who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our continent. Their bravery and dedication in the face of terrorism, violent extremism, and armed conflict, their names and stories, shall forever be etched in our hearts.

[Observes Minute of Silence]

Ladies and Gentlemen, your presence and active participation here today are of paramount importance. The current global landscape is fraught with geopolitical tensions, major power rivalries, and a fragmented international order. Africa is not immune to these challenges, as we witness the rise of transnational threats that test the very fabric of our security architecture. Your role and commitment are imperative in fortifying our defences and safeguarding our beloved continent's stability and peace.

Four days ago, with the AU PSC Military Staff Committee in Dar Es Salaam, the United Republic of Tanzania, we commemorated the 20th anniversary of the AU PSC. We reaffirmed our commitment to a unified and resilient Africa by reflecting on the Solemn Declaration of Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) adopted in 2004. Guided by the principles of human rights, peaceful coexistence, and respect for sovereignty, the CADSP remains our blueprint for peace, security, and development, fostering cooperation and integration for the well-being of all African people. This shared vision unites us in our efforts to create a harmonious and prosperous continent.
Since our last gathering, Africa has unfortunately witnessed an escalation of conflicts in regions such as Eastern DRC, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel. These conflicts, coupled with a worrying trend of unconstitutional changes of governments, have threatened the democratic foundations and security of our nations. These events create vacuums that are exploited by terrorist groups and violent extremists, external actors further destabilising our societies and hindering our progress towards sustainable peace.

In response to these challenges, the African Union Commission has diligently executed the directives of our Member States. Face to these challenges, we have provided essential assistance to Member States and their populations, mitigating the impacts of conflict and instability. The African Standby Force is a beacon of our commitment, ready to respond rapidly to conflicts and emergencies, reinforcing our collective capacity for conflict management and resolution. Regrettably, to date, the ASF remains working progress a situation that we need to change.

Mr Chairperson of the Experts Meeting,
Representatives of Member States, RECs/RMs, and
International partners here present

Ladies and Gentlemen, the timing of this meeting could not be more critical. In accordance with Article 14 of the Constitutive Act of the AU (2000), the STCDSS is entrusted with the annual task of guiding the Commission on defence, safety, and security matters. This forum allows us to update and seek continuous guidance from Member States on the implementation of decisions and priorities related to our peace and security agenda.

The Commission has submitted the Chairperson's report to the STCDSS, detailing the progress made since our 15th meeting. This report covers thematic areas such as Silencing the Guns, policy processes on the African Standby Force, compliance and accountability, financing of African Union Peace Support Operations, including through the AU Peace Fund, updates from current Peace Support Operations, and policy documents for the STCDSS’s consideration. This comprehensive report and key documents submitted for your review will form the basis of our discussions and strategic guidance moving forward.

Chair of the Experts Meetings,
Representatives of Member States, RECs/RMs and,
International partners here present!

Our collective efforts are pivotal to implementing the Africa Peace and Security Architecture and realising the goal of silencing guns in Africa. This endeavour is in line with Agenda 2063’s vision of a peaceful and stable continent. We rely on the wisdom and guidance of the STCDSS to enhance our efforts to promote peace, security, and stability across Africa.

I thank you all for your kind attention and look forward to engaging in constructive deliberations that will help us achieve the objectives of Our Union.