SIXTH MEETING OF THE AU-REGIONS STEERING COMMITTEE ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW) AND DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR)

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ABUJA, NIGERIA

OPENING STATEMENT

BY

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Dr. Cyriage Agnekethom, Director of Peacekeeping and Regional Security,

Distinguished Members of the Steering Committee,

Distinguished Director of the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa,

Distinguished representatives of the European Union Delegation in Abuja,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to convene our sixth meeting here in Abuja and at the ECOWAS Parliament. I wish to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to ECOWAS for graciously hosting this meeting and for all the preparations over the past weeks to ensure the smooth running of the meeting.

I also wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciations to all Members and Observers of the Steering Committee for making the time to come to Abuja, particularly in light of our full agendas at this time of the year. Your commitment and contribution to this forum guarantees its success and the fulfillment of its objectives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the year draws to a close, is time to reflect on what we have accomplished, new challenges that have emerged, and plan for the year ahead.

Throughout the year, we have continued to witness the death, devastation and destruction cause by small arms. In many countries, the insecurity and instability has been greatly enabled by the widespread of small arms and their ammunition.
Furthermore, arms and ammunition availability have significantly determined the dynamics of the crises, their magnitude and dimensions; thereby complicating conflict management and resolution efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nonetheless, and despite the challenges, our Member States, with the support of the members of the Steering Committee and the international partners, have worked to address illicit small arms at the national and regional levels.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our satisfaction with the commencement of the second phase of the project between the African Union and the European Union, implemented by RECSA. Our thanks go to the European Union for providing much needed financial assistance. We look forward to the timely and effective implementation of this phase and call for the active engagement of the members to ensure a collaborative approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Member States have also shown commendable commitment to international arms control efforts. As of today, 16 AU member States have ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, including five that have done so since our last meeting in June. The First Conference of States Parties was also held in August in Mexico with a positive outcome.

On behalf of the AU Commission and on my own behalf, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Emmanuel Imohe, Chairman of Nigeria’s Presidential
Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons, for his election as President of the Second Conference of States Parties to be held next year. I also wish to congratulate Mr. Simeon Dladla, Director for Arms Control at the South African Department of Defense, for his appointment, as the first Head of the ATT Secretariat.

The decision made by the First Conference to elect and appoint these two distinguished African professionals, is a testimony to the vital role played by the continent in developing and adopting the ATT and further highlights how the continent is among the most concerned and affected by irresponsible international arms transfers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On DDR, there have been commendable efforts that were accomplished in the three years of the project. Throughout the three years the members of the Steering Committee, our partners have always given it the necessary consideration and engaged with the African Union particularly, as we undertook needs assessment missions to Member States.

Indeed, the AU DDR program, has been successful in achieving it’s goals with great successes and take note of the developing synergy between DDR and SSR, which is vital for their complimentary success.

However, despite our successes, we have also faced some challenges, mostly due to the changing security environment in some of the Member States we have engaged with, however this will not deter us and we stand ready to re-engage as soon as the environment is conducive for our activities.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we come to the close of the year, we still have three key DDR activities to be undertaken: DDR briefing for the Government of Central Africa which is scheduled to be held at the end of this month, a training workshop for our AMISOM colleagues on necessary structures and procedures to be followed in the handling of disengaging combatants and the handover of five arms marking machines which we have procured with technical support from RECSA and subsequent training of AMISOM staff on the use of these weapons.

On conclusion of these activities, we will then take stock of all the activities undertaken within the three years, those that require necessary follow up and use this introspective reflection to guide us as we develop priority areas for the next phase of the DDR program. We have already identified broad DDR priority areas which build on that we have achieved and they have been included in APSA, as I’m sure you are also doing.

Whilst the DDR three project has come to a close, this does not mean that we have now closed the curtain on DDR activities. On the contrary, we will now focus all our efforts to ensure that these are planned and implemented under the APSA program, which allows for greater synergy with other programs, as well as, with the RECs.

I hope in our next meeting we will be able to share with you a draft of these activities and further continue to engage with you on this area. Only with our concerted effort can we realize the desired results.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to indicate that this meeting provides, an ideal opportunity to reflect on, and draw lessons, from the challenges and achievements of this year and to discuss how we can work collectively to ensure that our work becomes even more coordinated, effective and most importantly, sustainable, in 2016. Particularly, it is important that we consider how we can enhance this platform to go beyond information sharing to joint prioritization, planning and implementation. This will ensure that the work of the respective members is mutually reinforcing, addresses trans-regional issues and fosters inter-regional collaboration, thereby achieving a common continental objective.

I look forward to our exchanges during this meeting and the steps we agree on for the future.

Thank you for your attention.