H.E. Haile Menkerios, Head of UNOAU

Distinguished participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank you all for responding positively to the invitation to attend this meeting on the operationalization of the African Union Mediation Support Unit (AU-MSU).

The African Union, building upon the efforts of its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, plays a critical role in mediating conflicts across the continent, whether it is those arising from armed uprisings, constitutional disputes and unconstitutional change of government; electoral crises, secessionist wars and self-determination; or border disputes. These mediation efforts involve the appointment of eminent individuals or groups with the credibility, stature and expertise that enable them bring together a range of parties in a conflict to arrive at implementable agreements that are based on the principles and values of the AU.

Today, the range of conflicts that the AU has to mediate and resolve have not only persisted but have grown in complexity. A host of emerging threats to peace and security now influence conflict dynamics and complicate mediation efforts, such as the proliferation of illicit arms, especially small arms and light weapons; human and drug trafficking; and money laundering, as
well as natural resources exploitation and climate change. What complicates matters further is the fact that players in a conflict are no longer limited to defined political factions and armed groups with a political agenda, but have exceeded those to rogue elements to which violent conflict represents both the means and ends, such as terrorists and warlords. These new realities has called for the intensification of mediation efforts, and the AU is rising to the challenge of addressing them.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

The past five years, for example, have seen the AU step-up its mediation efforts. There is currently a number of Special Envoys and High-Representatives active in the field in conflict and post-conflict countries. In many cases they are supported by Liaison Offices on the ground or dedicated teams based at the AU Headquarters. Appointed by the Chairperson of the Commission, with the endorsement of the Peace and Security Council or the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments, these mediators work towards preventing the aggravation of potential conflicts or to bring an end to ongoing ones. They include active involvement in mediation efforts in Madagascar; mediation and transition in Guinea; the Somali peace and reconciliation process; the AU High-Level Panel on Sudan; the peace process in the Central African Republic; and conflict management efforts in Libya. One could also mention AU support for the IGAD mediation on South Sudan; as well as involvement in the East African Community (EAC) /Uganda-led dialogue on the situation in Burundi.

The mediation initiatives launched by the AU were not without significant challenges, both at the level of process and substance. In many instances, envoys and high-representatives were deployed in an ad hoc manner without adequate pre-deployment arrangements, and the assessments of the mission’s needs in terms of expertise and logistical support. Again, Liaison Offices and Field Missions on the ground, which also engage in mediation activities, often lack the required expertise and support. These operational challenges cause delays in deployment and tarnishes the commitment of the AU to realizing peace. Furthermore, in the absence of a
prompt and effective deployment, the situation on the ground is likely to worsen and further complicate the work of the AU.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to stress that these challenges, though daunting, have not reversed the progress made nor undermined the comparative strength of the AU in mediation. In recent years, the AU has recorded resounding as well as modest successes in its mediation efforts. Nonetheless, the continent, both leaders and people, continue to look to the AU to bring about lasting peace and stability.

In this regard, the diverse experiences in mediation accumulated over the years have to be systematically documented and carefully assessed and studied to amply enrich the practice of mediation in the AU. This will improve the current situation where the mediation efforts of the AU continue to take place with insufficient consideration for a systematic and coordinated approach, due to circumstances dictated by the conflict in question as well as the operational constraints under which the AU operates. The question often asked, in this regard, is: What needs to be improved in order to facilitate the work of groups and individuals mandated by the AU to undertake mediation efforts to assist parties in conflict to arrive at an implementable agreement?

The response lies in strengthening the mediation efforts of the AU by setting up an African Union Mediation Support Unit (AU-MSU). The main objectives of the unit is to ensure a systematic approach whereby the experiences and lessons learned in AU mediation efforts serve as a basis for formulating guidance and principles to strengthen the work of current mediators and facilitators as well as contribute to the elaboration of a template to support future and potential mediators and facilitators; build internal capacity for mediation and to collaborate with members states, the RECs, the United Nations, the International Community as well as Civil society and research institutes.
The AU is convinced that in order to have and effective mobilization and harnessing of the requisite capacity for internal mediation expertise for its continental coordination, leadership and ownership, it will need to strengthen international collaboration and partnership. This is because such partnership should strengthen the role of the AU in undertaking and overseeing the training and capacity building of RECs, member states, and its staff in order to support the work of mediators in the field.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

With these few words, I wish to welcome you to the AU Headquarters. I wish you the best of success in your deliberations during these three days.

I thank you