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TOWARDS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF UN-IMPOSED ARMS EMBARGOES IN AFRICA

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OPENING STATEMENT BY

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Excellences, representatives of African Union Member States and International Partners,

Distinguished representatives of Regional Economic Communities,

Distinguished representatives of the United Nations and International Organizations,

Esteemed members of research and civil society organizations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the AU Commission, to the seminar on the effective implementation of UN-imposed arms embargoes in Africa. At the outset, I wish to extend our thanks and appreciation to the Institute for Security Studies for partnering with the AU Commission in organizing this seminar, and for its continued partnership over the years.

The objective of today's seminar is to consider how the international sanctions regimes, and particularly arms embargoes, advance conflict prevention and crisis management on the African continent, identify the successes and challenges in their implementation, and propose measures to overcome the operational and political factors that undercut monitoring and enforcement efforts. In this regard, I wish to thank ISS for the recently issued policy brief on the topic, which will inform our deliberations today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Common African Defense and Security Policy, adopted by the 2nd Extraordinary Summit in 2004, was developed bearing in mind the security situation in

Africa. In this respect, the Common Policy, indeed, recognizes that illicit conventional weapons, whether originating internally or externally, threatens collective security and undermines the maintenance and promotion of peace, security and stability on the continent.

The AU also recognizes that while the causes and factors driving armed conflict have varied, the wide and devastating use of conventional weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, has remained a common characteristic among all of them. As witnessed in many regions of the continent, the availability of arms has significantly shaped the dynamics, scope and number of actors involved in the conflict. These arms have enabled large scale destruction, violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law. Therefore, the reduction and elimination of illicit arms flows into conflict zones will considerably reduce human suffering, provide a conducive environment for conflict resolution, peace-building and mitigate the risk of relapse into violence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This situation underlines a number of AU initiatives in recent years. In 2013, the 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Addis Ababa, adopted the Common African Position on the Arms Trade Treaty, which expressed the AU's strong desire for responsible and regulated international arms transfers and for prioritizing stability, conflict prevention and international law over arms trade.

That same summit adopted the AU Strategy to Control the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of small arms and light weapons. The Strategy provides a framework for common action and outlines the different roles and responsibilities of

the Commission, Regional Economic Communities, regional bodies and Member States, in implementing the international and regional instruments. It emphasizes African leadership and ownership; inclusion of civil society, women, and all segments of society affected by small arms; and the principle of shared responsibility. The Strategy is supported by an action plan that outlines key strategic interventions and activities to be undertaken at the different levels.

To ensure coordination and coherency of action, the AU-Regions Steering Committee on small arms and DDR, was established in 2008. The Committee meets twice a year to review the status of the implementation of the Strategy and other policy instruments, and formulates policy responses to emerging issues regarding illicit arms proliferation.

In April 2014, the Peace and Security Council of the AU held its 430th meeting under the theme: “Silencing the Guns: Pre-requisites for Realising a Conflict-Free Africa by the Year 2020”. The meeting called for practical measures to effectively address the illicit proliferation of conventional weapons including through universal adherence to the ATT and the “naming and shaming of suppliers, financiers, facilitators, transit points and recipients of illicit weapons”. The PSC thus agreed on the urgent need for the elaboration of a Roadmap to underpin the actions necessary for the attainment of the goal of a conflict-free Africa and requested the AU Commission to prepare its elements.

In response to the Council’s call, the Commission submitted, on 29 March 2016, a report titled *Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation*, which outlined the various gaps and challenges that perpetuate illicit arms proliferation on the continent including the poor enforcement of arms embargoes. The report draws information published by the United Nations sanctions committees, which highlight limited

institutional capacity of African states in monitoring and enforcing embargoes, as well as the lack of political will, and inadequate information sharing among states and sanction committees.

In this respect, the report recommends, among other things, that the Council should prioritize the issue of illicit arms control, as part of its conflict prevention and resolution efforts, including taking measures to curb the flow of weapons and ammunition into conflict zones; and further recommended that the Council works closely with the UN Security Council, and its sanctions committees, to explore means to enhance monitoring and enforcement of arms embargoes in a coordinated manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This seminar represents an important step to foster dialogue and understanding regarding arms embargoes in Africa within the context of Silencing the Guns. The seminar will consider the impact of uncontrolled arms, the current status of arms embargoes on the continent and their effectiveness, emerging challenges to global enforcement of arms embargoes, and the practical steps that can be taken by different AU organs, regional organizations, Member States, and international partners, in order to work coherently, openly and constructively in dealing with the challenges at hand.

I wish to end by thanking you all for joining us in this seminar and I look forward to its fruitful deliberation and concrete outcomes.

Thank you for your kind attention.