EIGHTH MEETING OF FOCAL POINTS OF THE
AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE STUDY AND RESEARCH ON TERRORISM (ACSRT)

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OPENING STATEMENT BY
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COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
Excellencies Ambassador and representatives of AU Member States,

Excellencies Ambassadors representatives of AU Partners and diplomatic Corps in Algiers,

Esteemed delegates and representatives of the United Nations and International organizations,

Distinguished representatives of CISSA and the Sahel Fusion and Liaison Unit,

Distinguished Focal Points of Member States and Regional Economic Communities,

Esteemed members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the African Centre for the Study and research on Terrorism. It is a great pleasure to have you at this important annual event, and as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Centre. I wish to thank the Government of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria for all the support and facilities it has provided over the past decade to ensure this Centre achieves the objectives for which it was established.

This eighth meeting takes place against the backdrop of escalating terrorist violence in different parts of our continent. Just a little over a week ago, a horrific attack was carried out against a mosque in Kano in Northern Nigeria, killing over a hundred innocent civilians, including many children. While no group has claimed responsibility for the attack, it nevertheless bears the hallmarks of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad or Boko Haram, a group that shows total disregard for human life. This group continues to hold in captivity dozens of young girls whose families have been living in anguish and despair for many months now, hoping for the return of their daughters.

Also a few weeks ago in Northern Kenya, Al-Shabaab carried out two horrendous attacks, reminding us of their continued brutality and the ever growing threat they are posing to regional peace and security. On the morning of December 2\textsuperscript{nd}, exactly five days ago, elements of the group descended upon a quarry near the town of Mandera, beheading and shooting at close range 36 workers. A week
before that, and in the same area, the group killed in the same way 28 travellers after forcing their bus off the road. In both incidents, the assailants separated and killed non-Muslims, pretending that its abhorrent violence is targeted, while at the same time they continue to murder Muslims indiscriminately inside Somalia; women, children and the elderly.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the Union’s appreciation and gratitude to the tremendous contribution made by the Government of Kenya and its people, as well as all troops contributing countries, to the AU Mission in Somalia, whose efforts, alongside those of the Somali National Forces, is giving millions of Somalis hope for stability and security in their country.

In Mali, terrorist groups continue to ambush and kill peacekeepers that are trying to create the conditions for the Malian people to pursue dialogue towards rebuilding their country and restoring the democratic system that the terrorist threatened in 2011. Since the United Nations first deployed in July 2013, and until early October, 31 peacekeepers have been killed and 91 wounded. I also wish to extend my condolences to the families of all peacekeepers killed in Mali and reiterate the Union’s appreciation to all troop contributing countries to the United Nations mission in Mali.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The terrorist threat we currently face serves as a reminder that terrorism and violent extremism, no matter where it breeds, will have a wide reaching impact if not timely and sustainably curbed. The Sahel region has long suffered the menace of Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, a franchise of an organization that has terrorized the world and whose leadership hides away in caves in far flung places. Once more, we witness the destabilizing impact of the events taking place in the Middle East which has affected not only that region, but also provided inspiration to terrorist groups in Africa and further seduced, with its twisted ideology and false promises, many of our youth to leave home and join its ranks.

In September of this year, a group referring to itself as Jund al-Khalifa, and which had pledge allegiance to the so called Islamic State (DAECH), abducted and barbarically beheaded before the world a French citizen in Algeria. Boko Haram also followed suit and changed its tactics of carrying out raids and bombings from its hideouts, to actively seizing and controlling territory. Other groups in Libya and Tunisia have also pledged allegiance to IS. Moreover, it is believed that over 4,000
Africans are among the ranks of IS, participating in serious atrocities in that region and will also pose a serious threat should they return to Africa and should we fail to put in place the necessary mechanisms to deal with them accordingly to the law.

It is against this background, and recognizing the growing and shifting nature of the threat, that the Peace and Security Council held its Summit level meeting earlier in September. The Summit stressed that dealing with terrorism is a multi-dimensional and multi-leveled effort that requires serious and continued efforts by Member States, Regional Economic Communities, and the international community. In this regard the Summit expressed concern that, despite the progress made in developing a comprehensive normative and operational counter-terrorism framework, serious implementation gaps continue to exist and which undermines the effectiveness of Africa’s response to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. It therefore stressed the urgency for an action-oriented approach to give concrete expression to the commitment made by the Member States pursuant to these frameworks.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There are key pillars through which we can have an effective and sustainable response to terrorism and violent extremism; these are clearly outlined in the international and regional counterterrorism instruments, including the 1999 OAU convention and its 2004 Protocol as well as the United National Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. These pillars and related measures we elaborated in detail in the communiqué adopted by the Peace and Security Council which now forms a roadmap for what needs to be done. There are two key aspects however that I would like to highlight.

Firstly, we must strengthen the criminal justice response to terrorism and the rule of law. As you are aware, the African Union as well as the international community has developed, over the years, a number of legal instruments that deal with terrorism and related crimes. However the ratification and implementation rates of these instruments remain low and our courts, police and intelligence services and other law enforcement agencies are poorly equipped and skilled to pursue, punish and deter terrorists. The criminal justice response to terrorism cannot be understated - it is the mean through which we derive
legitimacy and assure our population that we are capable of delivering to them the justice they so desperately seek.

Secondly, without addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism we will continue to deal with the symptoms instead of the underlying causes. We may not agree on what drives a young man or woman to commit a terrorist act or join a terrorist group, nor will we be able to stop every single individual from subscribing to an ideology of intolerance and violence, but we can address the conditions that alienate our population and youth, the conditions that lead them to lose faith in democratic values and social justice, as well as the conditions that confines them to abject poverty and disenfranchisement.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the mechanism of the focal points was first established and its code of conduct adopted, it was envisaged that the focal points role will be to coordinate the activities of all national actors involved in countering terrorism, contribute to comprehensive knowledge at the continental level about terrorist and criminal networks and activities to ensure that national and regional responses are commensurate to the threat, and to coordinate the implementation of measures and recommendations called for the by organs of the Union as well the Focal Points Platform.

Progress has been made and I commend your commitment to this collaborative effort, but I trust you will agree with me when I say that this platform is yet to achieve its full potential. There is still room for improvement; room to strengthen our coordination roles at the national and regional levels, to timely and effectively share information amongst us and with the Centre, and to take a more active role in mobilizing national authorities on the implementation of the different aspects of the counter-terrorism framework.

I therefore call upon all of you to reflect over the next few days on how we can address the gaps and shortcomings that will set us on course for the next decade. The Centre remains available to support you in every way possible to ensure that you have the tools, guidance and support necessary to carry out your task.

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.