Opening Remarks by Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security
At the PSC Open Session on Preventive Diplomacy
22 March 2013

Let me first join you in welcoming the PSC members as well as all our guests to this important thematic meeting on «the full use of available tools on preventive diplomacy to consolidate and preserve peace and security in Africa».

The on-going violent conflicts in Africa highlight the continuing need for the African Union (AU) to remain actively seized not only of the management and resolution of conflicts, but also with the prevention of armed conflict. Regional, continental and international efforts to manage and resolve conflicts in Africa raise the necessity to deliberate on how to enhance the tools and methodology for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

I would like to seize the opportunity to reflect more generally on the notion of preventive diplomacy, the efforts being made by the OAU/AU on conflict
prevention in general and preventive diplomacy in particular in the course of the past decade. I will also outline some challenges which, I believe, this open debate will help address.

In view of the changing nature of violent conflict after the end of the Cold War, you would recall that in June 1992 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then UN Secretary-General, in a report entitled An Agenda for Peace coined the phrase “Preventive diplomacy”, in which he sought to define its role in peace-making and peace-keeping in the activities of the UN and by extension that of international organizations. While preventive diplomacy was historically seen to be at the centre of conflict prevention policies, the concept of preventive diplomacy developed further as the nature of violent conflict changed and related notions of sovereignty have undergone considerable evolution. Hence preventive diplomacy is embedded in a larger set of practices which seek to address violent conflicts by measures including prevention.

Today, many organizations, including the African Union, implement policies that relate to both direct prevention and structural prevention of violent conflicts. Thus, preventive action would involve, simultaneously, a direct and operational focus of intervening before violence occurs as well as a structural, strategic focus of addressing the structural/root causes of conflict. While direct and structural prevention remain two distinct policy responses based on the kind of conflict they seek to address, they can also be mutually reinforcing in order to be more effective. Furthermore, direct and structural prevention approaches can be deployed at various points in the conflict cycle, thus, in the period before, during and after a conflict.
In this context, preventive diplomacy includes actions deployed to prevent the escalation of disputes into violent armed conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they have occurred. Preventive diplomacy may also be seen as including more coercive type measures such as preventive deployment, targeted sanctions and even peacekeeping. These efforts complement structural prevention of measures which seek to address structural/root causes of violent conflict.

In 1993 the Secretary-General of the OAU in his report titled “Resolving Conflicts in Africa: Implementation Options”, provided an historical overview of the Organization’s involvement in conflict management in Africa and the record of the continental organization regarding preventive diplomacy. The report highlighted the OAU’s rich experience with the Commission on Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration; Ad-hoc committees/commissions; mediation by African Heads of State; the Assembly; as well as cease-fire observations and peace-keeping missions.

As you may be aware, the AU prioritizes the principle of peaceful resolution of conflicts among Member States as well as the respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. To further these objectives and support its principles, the AU’s policies of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention involve key actors and institutions, which include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Chairperson of the AU Commission (AUC), the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) and the African Union’s Border Program.
Over the years, the African Union has deployed a variety of different measures of preventive diplomacy. Whether through the appointment by the Chairperson of the Commission of Special Representatives/Envoys, the appointment of Mediators, fact-finding missions and election observation missions, the co-establishment of International Contact Groups, the AU has demonstrated a keen commitment to the direct prevention of conflicts. Notable among them are preventive actions taken by the AU in cases of unconstitutional changes of government, election related violence, peace-making and support to peace building initiatives.

It is against this background and in addition to the steps already taken to resolve existing conflicts and consolidate the gains made, that there is need to strengthen the on-going efforts to address the root causes of conflicts in a holistic and systematic manner through direct and structural prevention. These should include:

a) strengthening the link between early warning and preventive diplomacy through appropriate support and closer engagement with the Chairperson, the Panel of the Wise and other relevant actors by making more systematic use of horizon scanning approaches, as suggested in December 2006 at a meeting between the AU and governmental experts from Member States;

b) documenting best practices and developed lessons learned as experienced by the Panel of the Wise, the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PANWISE), AU High-Level Representatives and Special Envoys as well as the AU’s regional counterparts;
c) Regular briefing by the Commission’s Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to the Peace and Security Council on election observation by the African Union and the state of elections in Member States, in order to assist in preventing potential election-related crises and violence;

d) addressing the requirements of policy coordination on peace and security issues within the AUC by establishing, as a matter of urgency, an Inter-Departmental Task Force on Conflict Prevention to be co-ordinated by the Director of Peace and Security and comprises of representatives of most Departments of the Commission and, as appropriate, representatives of the RECs / Regional Mechanisms.

In order to sustain the momentum already established and to increase the visibility of the efforts undertaken by AU and regional organizations in conflict prevention, there is the need to periodically review and exchange views on the best ways to address the peace and security challenges facing the continent and to enhance coordination between all components of the APSA. In this regard the High-Level Retreat of the African Union Representatives and Special Envoys on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa, represents a good beginning.

Your deliberations, today, which are, in a way, a contribution to the African Renaissance that we celebrate this year in the context of the 50th anniversary of the OAU/AU, will undoubtedly go a long way in helping to promote a culture of conflict prevention within the AU and across the continent. So, I wish to thank you, Chairperson, for such an excellent initiative.

I thank you and wish you a fruitful deliberation.