STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI,
COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY,
AT THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY
ADDIS ABABA, 29 JANUARY 2017
I am pleased to have this opportunity to highlight to you the current security and humanitarian situation in the areas affected by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). I will highlight key developments in our collective efforts against the LRA, which I hope will guide our exchange of views so to chart a way forward for achieving the strategic end state of the “Elimination of the LRA, leading to the creation of a secure and stable environment in the affected countries”.

Currently, the strength of the LRA is estimated to be between 150 and 200 members, including dependents. The group has about 120 armed fighters, operating in several splinter groups that frequently move across the common borders of CAR, DRC and sometimes South Sudan. LRA continues to perpetrate heinous atrocities against civilians and attacks on AU RTF Forces, occasionally succeeding in taking their equipment, arms and soldiers. LRA’s main source of supplies and survival is the Garamba National Park in the DRC, where they poach elephants to obtain ivory and game meat for their sustainment. LRA also sustains itself with money from the sale of minerals (gold and diamond) looted from miners in CAR. Other LRA survival activities include abductions, looting, and ambushes on travelers and traders.

The findings of a joint assessment conducted by AU and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa to Dungu Sector, in north-eastern DRC, from 25-28 October 2016, have reshaped our perception of the LRA threat. It was
found that, although the fighting capacity of the LRA has been significantly degraded, the group, owing to its terrorist nature, still has the capacity to reorganize and carry out large scale atrocities against civilians. Together with other armed negative groups, LRA has made it impossible for the local population in north-eastern DRC to freely undertake their daily subsistence activities. It therefore remains a big threat to peace and stability in the region.

Despite the foregoing, the RCI-LRA has made significant progress towards the elimination of the LRA. The diplomatic interactions of the Commission, through the AU Special Envoy for LRA Issues, have sustained the commitment of the Troop Contributing Countries and strategic neighbours against the LRA. In September 2015, a delegation of the Commission led by the AU Special Envoy for LRA Issues and accompanied by the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), engaged with the Sudanese authorities on the LRA Issue. They obtained the goodwill of the Sudanese authorities to support the RCI-LRA and prevent Joseph Kony and his LRA from establishing any sanctuary on their national territory. The Sudanese authorities also gave green light for an AU-led fact-finding mission to Kafia Kingi to verify the alleged presence of LRA therein. This field visit is yet to be undertaken. Above all, during the 5th ministerial meeting of the Joint Coordination mechanism (JCM), held in Addis Ababa, in May 2016, Sudan expressed interest in becoming a member of the RCI-LRA. The JCM agreed to consider Sudan’s request, in consultation with South Sudan which expressed reservation at the time.

The implementation of the RCI-LRA has been facing serious challenges. First of all, the Regional Task Force (RTF) has inadequate manpower, operating with only 3,000 troops in a vast area with a challenging terrain and no roads. To date, CAR has only 38 troops in the RTF, with no support and combat effectiveness against
the LRA. Secondly, the RTF lacks the requisite force multipliers and enablers (air and ground assets). Thirdly, the lack of a Police Force on the ground to enforce law and order and free the RTF to go into robust tracking and pursuit of the LRA. Fourthly, lack of predictable funding and logistical support to the RTF is a major challenge for our counter-LRA efforts.

Excellencies, new realities have also emerged in the RTF Theater of operations, presenting further challenges to our counter-LRA operations. These include the political conflicts in eastern CAR and the Greater Equatoria region of South Sudan which are undermining our efforts. RTF troops, particularly the South Sudanese contingent, have suffered losses and injuries in rebel ambushes in central and Western Equatorial Region of South Sudan. A greater part of the Main Supply Route of the Ugandan contingent is controlled by the South Sudanese rebels. We are concerned about the reported presence of LRA elements in some areas of DRC adjacent to the operational areas of the South Sudanese rebels as it raises suspicion about their collaboration. Above all, the intention of the Government of Uganda to withdraw its troops from the RTF, as announced at the 5th ministerial meeting of the JCM in Addis Ababa, has presented a great uncertainty to the Commission and its partners insofar as programming their 2017 counter-activities are concerned. We request the leadership of Uganda to reconsider this decision for the sake of peace and stability in the region.

The AU RTF, supported by US Special forces, has made a huge contribution in the fight against LRA in the region. We appreciate the US logistical support, without which the RTF counter-LRA operations would be more challenging. Likewise, we appreciate the EU financial contribution for the activities of the JCM Secretariat, AU Special Envoy for LRA Issues, and the RTF Headquarters.
Excellencies, I wish to conclude by stressing that, in terms of numbers and state security, the LRA, indeed, no longer constitutes any threat to the Governments in Kampala, Kinshasa, Bangui, Juba and Khartoum. However, in terms of human security, the LRA remains a big threat to peace and stability in the region. In this regard, we need to sustain momentum against the LRA until it is eliminated and Kony is brought to justice.

Even if LRA is eliminated, we will need to deal with the devastating impact of its atrocities in the region by undertaking stabilization, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction in the areas affected by the activities of the LRA. Towards this end, the RCI-LRA will need more robust support, including sustainable and predictable funding as well as logistics. This calls for continued collaborative efforts through political and strategic partnership between the affected countries, AU, UN, EU and other actors involved in the fight against the LRA, basing on the principle of collective responsibility and burden sharing.

Thank you.