SIXTH MEETING OF THE FOCAL POINTS OF THE
AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE STUDY AND RESEARCH ON TERRORISM
18-20 NOVEMBER 2012
ALGIERS

OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR RAMTANE LAMAMRA
COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
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Honorable Representative of the Government of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, Ambassador Mohamed Kamel Rezag Bara, Counselor to the President of the Republic;

Honorable Chairperson of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA);

Distinguished CISSA’s Executive Secretary, Mr. Isaac Moyo;

Ambassador Madeira, Special Representative for Counter-terrorism Cooperation and Director of the ACSRT;

Distinguished Heads and Representatives of Intelligence and Security Services of Member States;

Honorable Admiral, Head of Nigeria’s Defense College;

Focal Points of Member States and Regional Economic Communities;

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Members of Diplomatic Missions;

Representatives of the United Nations, Sahel Fusion and Liaison Unit, as well as Partner Organizations and Institutions;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Welcome to the Sixth Meeting of the ACSRT Focal Points. I would like to thank you for your commitment to this forum. I am glad to be part of it, once more bringing to you all the support and encouragement of the AU Commission in your noble mission.

We have witnessed many developments on the continent, both positive and negative, since we met here in October last year. This year’s meeting will focus on the links between terrorism and transnational organized crime. The evidence regarding these links has been emerging over the past years in the situation in the region, raising serious concerns. Over the last months, we experienced first-hand the consequences of such trends.

Indeed, not very far from here, a situation of great concern has unfolded. Many people in this room were perhaps among the most knowledgeable about the prevailing
security environment in the Sahel region in general, and northern Mali in particular. This was prior to the political developments that took place this year which were manifested by the resurgence of the Tuareg rebellion in January and the subsequent coup d’état in Bamako on 22 March 2012.

Over the past years, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and criminal groups found an ideal sanctuary, capitalizing on the many vulnerabilities that include porous borders, weakened state institutions as a result of prolonged civil strife, poverty, environmental degradation and challenges to securing natural resources. AQIM has entrenched itself in the Sahel region, particularly northern Mali, through the establishment of social, political and economic ties with other similar groups operating in the region. The group has been deeply involved in the illicit economy of the region, which encompasses the lucrative smuggling business and trafficking of arms, humans and drugs. AQIM also commanded kidnap-for-ransom activities which involved a complex web of perpetrators and intermediaries.

When the rebellion resurged, terrorist and criminal groups had the resources and the means to hijack it. Today, AQIM and its cells are not only engaged in subversive acts against the states of the region, but they are also in effective control of certain territories of the region.

This situation is taken very seriously by the countries of the region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the core countries, the African Union and the international community as a whole. Since January of this year, the crisis in Mali, through its different aspects – security, political and humanitarian – has become one of the most serious and pressing crises impacting on the African and the global security landscapes.

Dear Participants,

Since the adoption, in 1992, of the Resolution on the strengthening of cooperation and coordination among African states against terrorism and extremism, the AU has adopted a zero tolerance policy on terrorism.

As we have continued to stress since the adoption of the Algiers Decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in 1999 and the Lome Declaration on the framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes in 2000, there is no longer a place for violent political action in Africa.

In this respect, we have continued to stress that for any negotiated resolution to the crisis in northern Mali to take place, all rebel groups claiming to have legitimate claims within the Republic of Mali must sever all their ties with terrorist groups, reject all forms of terrorism and crime as well as separatist tendencies.
Progress is being made in collaboration with the Malian authorities, the core countries and ECOWAS. Just less than a week ago, the Peace and Security Council endorsed the Harmonized Concept of Operations for the deployment of an African-led international Support Force in Mali – MISMAS/AFISMA. This deployment aims at responding to the request by the Malian authorities to regain control over the occupied regions in the north of the country, dismantle the terrorist and criminal networks and restore effectively the authority of the State over the entire national territory. The Concept of Operations was, on the day of its adoption by the PSC, transmitted to the UN Secretary-General. In the meantime, efforts aimed at promoting a peaceful solution to the crisis are being stepped up, within an enhanced strategic coordination between the core countries, ECOWAS, the AU and the United Nations as well as other international partners. Encouraging developments are looming at the horizon, as the Malian armed groups Ansar Dine and MNLA are making some positive steps in the right direction. Now also is the time for the Government of Mali to put in place a national structure in charge of negotiations with the Malian armed groups and adopt a consensual Roadmap leading to the completion of the restoration of constitutional and democratic order in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Somalia, thanks to the relentless efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM and the Somali Forces, remarkable progress has been made in countering al-Shabab's terrorist activities. After pushing Al-Shabab out of Mogadishu in August last year, it became clear that in order to significantly weaken it, the terrorist group should have to be pushed out of the port city of Kismayo. This city has been a major financial hub for the group, which had established ties with the piracy and smuggling networks, generating large sums of money through taxation systems and protection fees.

In October 2012, AMISOM, represented by the Kenya contingent, as well as Somali Security Forces, advanced towards Kismayo and in a matter of weeks the Al-Shabaab was removed from the city, the liberation of Kismayo symbolized the defeat of Al Shabab as a military force in the country.

For the first time in more than two decades, Somalis can now work towards establishing central, regional and local representative institutions and promote unity and reconciliation, building on the successful election of the President of the Republic and the formation of a functional Cabinet.

Besides the successes, we still face challenges in other regions, such as in Nigeria where Boko Haram’s carnage continues. The LRA criminal adventure throughout several African countries also continues.
In other parts of the continent, small, but nonetheless lethal and destabilizing terrorist cells also continue their operations. Furthermore, narco-terrorism and mercenarism are also part of the prevailing security landscape in Africa, featuring some of the most challenging threats to the overall peace and stability of the continent.

We have also witnessed over the past years a rise in acts of violent extremism perpetrated, not only by organized terrorist groups, but also by individuals operating independently, who subscribe to the narrative of intolerance, hatred and violence. These radicalized elements are a threat to our societies and to the principles of democracy and peaceful co-existence which the continent has long sought. Terrorist acts cannot be justified under any circumstances. But while we consider how to counter the threat terrorists pose, we must equally engage in addressing the conditions and factors that drive such elements into committing terrorist and violent acts, whether independently or through organized groups. Only then can we effectively and sustainably protect our territories and, more importantly, citizens against terrorism and related phenomena.

Terrorism, violent extremism, transnational organized crime and mercenarism are converging. Failure to address these threats comprehensively, effectively and collectively puts at risk the very foundations of viable democratic states in Africa which our people have been striving for since independence.

Once more, the AU Peace and Security Council, at its annual meeting on terrorism held on 13 November, in Addis Ababa, assessed the situation, noted the success thus far achieved and opened new avenues to our collective and concerted efforts aimed at strengthening Africa’s contribution to the global struggle against terrorism. The active involvement of CISSA in the proceedings, in the PSC as well as here, is a clear testimony to Africa’s resolve to scale up its action against terrorism and to renew its strong will to defeat it once and for all.

I trust, that, as this meeting progresses, these various elements will be kept in mind and I look forward to the positive outcomes of your deliberations.

Thank you.