“YOUTH FOR PEACE ETHIOPIA: CROSS-REGIONAL DIALOGUE AND EXPERIENCE SHARING WORKSHOP”
26-27 November 2019

Remarks by the Commissioner for Peace and Security
Ambassador Smaïl Chergui
Your Excellency Minister of Peace, Muferihat Kamil
Esteemed participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to welcome you all here to the “Youth For Peace Ethiopia: Cross-Regional Dialogue and Experience Sharing Workshop.” I would like to begin by thanking the Ethiopian Government for the collaborative efforts to partner with the African Union Commission for this important initiative. I would also like to seize this moment to commend the Government and people of Ethiopia for their efforts to promote and ensure the empowerment and participation of the youth in peace and development initiatives in the country.

I am also very delighted to see our Ethiopian youth participants who have responded to the invitation to take part in this timely workshop. This is a clear demonstration of your aspirations and genuine commitment to advance the cause of peace and development in your country. Let me also express my sincere appreciation to our talented young women and men across the continent, which are playing cardinal roles towards the promotion of peace and nation building in their respective countries.
Excellency, Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I delve into the main objective of the meeting, allow me to express my appreciation and gratitude to the Government and people of Ethiopia for the strides the country is making towards an inclusive, accountable and a democratic nation that is creating the conditions for inclusive and participatory socio-economic development for its youth and the general public. On behalf of the African Union Commission, I wish to commend the Government of Ethiopia for its commitment towards taking bold steps to widen the political space through releasing political prisoners and inviting exiled opposition parties to return and pursue a peaceful struggle in the country.

As one of the African Union’s valued Member States and our host country, Ethiopia’s efforts towards attaining durable peace and security on the continent are exemplary. We are grateful to Ethiopia’s steadfast contributions to peacekeeping and peace support operations in some of the most challenging places on the continent; as well as her resilience and commitment to hosting millions of refugees fleeing violent conflict and natural disasters from neighboring countries. By these actions and several others, the Government and people of Ethiopia have displayed unwavering
solidarity and support to their African brothers and sisters.

**Excellency, Ladies and gentlemen,**

This workshop is taking place at the backdrop of ongoing political reforms, democratization processes, as well as the holding of the country’s national elections in 2020. These political reforms are aimed at creating a more accountable and transparent governance that is responsive to its citizens.

However, political reform processes take time and are always fraught with challenges. Particularly, we know from experience that election periods heighten the vulnerabilities of countries. As such, Ethiopia’s success in conducting a credible and peaceful election will be key to the successful implementation of the comprehensive reform agenda. We must work together – old and young, to ensure the gains so far made are not reversed but rather consolidated.

In this context, the Youth in Ethiopia can and are encouraged to play a significant role in the overall reform process and the holding of credible and peaceful elections. Harnessing the positive contributions of the youth and ensuring their active participation in the political discourse and decision-making processes will be key
for the successful implementation of the reform agenda and other peacebuilding efforts.

I wish to underscore our partnership with Ethiopia and the African Union’s readiness to work together, share expertise and knowledge for the successful holding of the upcoming national elections and the implementation of the reform agenda.

**Excellency, Ladies and gentlemen,**

These developments in Ethiopia are taking place in a region, which continues to suffer from challenges related to weak governance and state institutions, porous borders, slowing economic growth, undermining our nation-building and peacebuilding efforts.

While the last year has witnessed positive developments in Ethiopia and the East Africa region at large, with the normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as between Djibouti and Eritrea; advancement of the regional integration agenda between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, as well as the political reform processes in Ethiopia and Sudan, some challenges still remain.

Our region continues to face insecurities propelled by various terrorist and criminal groups such as Al Shabaab. Moreover,
transnational organized crime such as drugs and human trafficking, money laundering and the illicit financial outflows are undermining peace and security in the region and must be confronted.

The impacts of climate change such as, environmental degradation, desertification, floods, drought and famine are also resulting in security risks such as massive displacement of our people, which in turn has translated to increased inter-communal violence. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach as well as a concerted effort by all of us at the Continental, regional and national levels.

**Excellency, Ladies and gentlemen,**

At the continental level, in spite of the notable advances we have made in preventing and resolving conflicts on the continent, challenges to human security and sustainable development remain deep and structural in nature. It is this realization that led our leaders to commit to the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which is Africa’s blueprint for its long-term socio-economic and integrative transformation, reflecting the continental drive to create peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Within this context, the Assembly of Heads of State and
Government of the African Union in 2013 in their declaration on Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, that was marking the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU pledged “not to bequeath the burden of wars to the next generation of Africans” and undertook to end all wars in Africa by the year 2020. In order to realize these objectives, I wish to underscore the key role of our Member States. They have the primary responsibility for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We, at the African Union, are working to support the efforts of our Member States to place themselves on the path to sustainable peace and development.

We have developed tools to enhance the capacity of our Member States for conflict prevention and early warning and we have availed them for use by our Member States. We have a robust Continental Early Warning System, which has developed state of the art tools and methods for efficient data gathering and analysis.

We have launched the FemWise-Africa Program, which is a Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation - established as part of our efforts to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation. The network has accredited more than three hundred (300) women from all over Africa, out of which 22 are from Ethiopia.
In recognition of the increasing roles and contributions of youth to peace and security, we launched the Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa Program in September 2018, through which this workshop was initiated. The objective of the program is to dissuade youth from partaking in violence and facilitate their meaningful participation in all spectrums of peace and security in Africa. In this regard, the program seeks to effectively engage and harness the capacities of energies of young women and men as formidable partners in the prevention, management and resolution of violence on the continent.

To this end, I am pleased to inform you of the considerable strides of the program including the conduct of a continental study on their roles and contributions to peace and security; development of a continental framework on youth, peace and security, selection and consideration of five regional African Youth Ambassadors for Peace as well as conduct of national level dialogues in some member states on youth, peace and security. These actions have promoted recognition at the Assembly of the Union as well as PSC levels and instigated several expectations from young people and Member States across the continent. It is my greatest hope that we can indeed achieve the main objective of dissuading youth from all
acts of violence, transforming the stereotypes that they are perpetrators of violence and effectively work with them to achieve sustainable peace, security and development.

**Excellency, Ladies and gentlemen**

In the next two days, I would like to encourage you to engage in candid discussions on the roles and contributions of youth in peace and conflict as well as the challenges they face in Ethiopia and on the continent at large. This workshop should serve you the opportunity to share experiences and best practices of youth engagement in democratization processes, nation building and peacebuilding efforts across Africa.

For the African Union and IGAD, it will also give us the opportunity to take stock of the progress and challenges encountered at the national level in ensuring the participation and empowerment of youth in peacebuilding efforts. We will jointly examine the lessons and identify innovative ways that we can support bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and I look forward to learning of the concrete recommendations on how to promote youth involvement and participation in peacebuilding efforts in Ethiopia.

I Thank You.