SEVENTH MEETING OF THE AU-REGIONS STEERING COMMITTEE ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW) AND DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR)

19-20 OCTOBER 2016
DJIBOUTI, DJIBOUTI

OPENING STATEMENT BY
DR. TAREK A. SHARIF, HEAD OF DEFENCE AND SECURITY DIVISION
Your Excellency, Ambassador Tewolde Gebermeskel, Director, Peace and Security, Distinguished Members of the Steering Committee, Distinguished representatives of UNREC, the EU and the World Bank, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to convene our seventh meeting here in Djibouti at the IGAD Headquarters. I wish to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to IGAD for graciously hosting this meeting and for all the preparations over the past weeks to ensure the smooth running of the meeting. I also wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciations to all Members and Observers of the Steering Committee for joining us at this meeting and for their continued commitment and contribution to this important forum.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting is yet another important opportunity to review the progress achieved in 2016, consider the challenges encountered, and strategize for the year ahead. This is especially necessary, as we continue to witness how illicit small arms and light weapons fuel conflicts, crime and terrorism across Africa. It’s also important to note that the incomplete and ineffective processes of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is threatening stability and peace agreements in many post-conflict situations. This is why this committee must spare no effort to strengthen and coordinate its work to combat illicit arms trafficking at the national, sub-regional and continental levels in support of Member States’ efforts.

Therefore, during the course of the meeting, we will receive updates from the members of the Steering Committee, as well as from the observers, on the activities and projects that they have implemented during the course of 2016, as well as, their plans from 2017 and beyond. The meeting will also review the status of the implementation of the final phase of the AU-EU-RECSA project and the main achievements and lessons learned. This will further allow us to discuss how best to sustain and continue the important work being done, since the project was launched. The meeting will also review the important progress made in the operationalization of AFRIPOL and how Steering Committee can promote and strengthen, the AU initiative on Silencing the Guns by 2020.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, steady progress has been made in our collective efforts to combat illicit small arms proliferation and to implement effective DDR interventions. I am delighted to inform that the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) is taking concrete steps to fully exercise its mandate and powers to prevent illicit arms flows into conflict zones and to extend its influence to strengthening DDR, as a critical component of conflict resolution and post-conflict stabilization. This development comes, as part of the report of the Chairperson of the Commission presented to the PSC on 29 March, which is the first dedicated to the theme ‘arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation’. The report was presented to inform and support the Council’s efforts to
Silencing the Guns by the year 2020, as envisioned in the declaration adopted by the Assembly of Heads of States and Government on the 50th anniversary of the African Union.

I would like also to inform that during the course of 2016, four AU Member States ratified the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), bringing the number of States Parties in the continent to twenty-one and on DDR the first phase of the implementation of the AU DDR Capacity project for the period 2013 to 2015, has been successfully concluded. Currently, The AU have in place all the required normative frameworks to deal with the challenges of illicit small arms proliferation and various DDR policy instruments, as well as best practices and technical guidance on DDR. Important progress has also been made in the operationalization of AFRIPOL where its statute was considered and adopted by the Specialized Technical Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs that met in September 2016 in Lomé.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The progress made in 2016 was not without challenges. Indeed, the universality and implementation of the ATT is faced with a number of institutional and political challenges, as highlighted by the 2nd Conference of States Parties held, in August 2016 in Geneva. While some Member States have ratified the ATT during the year, as I mentioned earlier, the overall ratification rate remains low. The Steering Committee must, therefore, intensify its efforts to promote the universality of the ATT in line with the renewed call made by the AU PSC, and more importantly, assist member states in instituting effective transfer controls and physical security and management measures. In fact, poor physical security and stockpile management remains the primary contributor to illicit arms flows.

The issue of DDR and relapse into violence in many post-conflict countries across the continent further raises serious questions, about the current approaches to DDR and continued lack of political will of warring parties. This requires rethinking actions and approaches at all stages of conflict management and resolution to ensure the following: First, DDR is fully negotiated and integrated into agreements ending armed hostilities. Second, the policy organs of the AU and RECs must continue to oversee and actively engage the concerned parties to ensure full and effective implementation of DDR obligations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like also to take this opportunity to indicate that the AU initiative of Silencing the Guns by 2020, an important chance to build our momentum and capitalize on the efforts led by the PSC, to ensure that illicit arms control and DDR are streamlined into all of the continent’s conflict management initiatives and resolution undertakings. Thus, the Steering Committee has the potential to play a strong support and advisory role to the Council and other organs of the AU.
I therefore look forward to the exchanges that we will have during this meeting, the information we will share, the opportunities we uncover, and steps we agree on to realize this potential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I wish to thank the IGAD Secretariat once again for hosting this meeting, and thank you all for your time and commitment.

Thank you for your attention.