Press Release

13 New AU and ECOWAS Human Rights Observers Begin Pre-deployment Training in Bamako

Bamako, 11 July 2013 – In preparation for their deployment across Mali, especially in the three northern regions of the country – Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal - a group of 13 Human Rights Observers are currently being trained in Bamako.

The Observers are from Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, the Central African Republic (CAR), Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They are the second batch of African Human Rights Observers to be deployed in Mali, as part of the implementation of the decisions of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the Authority of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These decisions were endorsed by the United Nations Security Council in its Resolutions 2085 (December 2012) and 2100 (April 2013).

The pre-deployment training, organized by the African Union Office in Mali (the temporary AU successor to AFISMA) in collaboration with the Human Rights Component of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), will enable the Observers to: understand their mandate, as well as the political sociology and security situation of Mali; become familiar with the key Human Rights stakeholders, challenges and opportunities in Mali; know the key players and opportunities for collaboration; appreciate the special situation of vulnerable groups, including women, children and displaced persons; master the strategies and techniques used in monitoring prisons and detention centres; and update their survival skills in hostile environments.

Welcoming the Observers on behalf of the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Head of the AU Office in Mali, President Pierre Buyoya, his Special Advisor, General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, reiterated the commitment of the AU and ECOWAS to monitor and help improve the Human Rights situation in Mali. “The AU and ECOWAS, together with the EU and UN, have unanimously acknowledged the urgent need to ensure the protection of civilians in the
Mali conflict, by promoting respect by all parties of international Human Rights and Humanitarian Law,” General Mokoko stated.

On her part, the Head of the AU and ECOWAS Human Rights Observers in Mali, Ms. Reine Alapini Gansou, a Lawyer and Law Professor from Benin, who is a Member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa, described the work of the African Human Rights Observers as “Part of Africa’s contribution to peace and justice in Mali.” She commended the first group of nine Observers for a job well done under challenging circumstances, adding that the deployment of 13 more Observers should help facilitate the achievement of the mandate of the African Human Rights Observers in Mali, as defined by the leadership of the AU and ECOWAS.

The Head of the MINUSMA Human Rights Component, Mr. Guillaume Ngefa, highlighted the enhanced collaboration of the AU and UN in Mali, in the area of Human Rights, and urged the new Observers to work in the same spirit. “It is important for international Human Rights Observers in Mali to continue working in close collaboration, in order to avoid any confusion among stakeholders, especially the Malian people, as well as Bilateral and Multilateral Partners,” Mr. Ngefa emphasized.

Upon completing their training, the 13 Observers will join the nine African Human Rights Observers already on the ground in Bamako, Gao and Timbuktu, and will also deploy to Kidal as soon as the security situation permits.

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