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**AFRICA REGIONAL WORKSHOP IN PREPARATION FOR THE EIGHTH REVIEW
CONFERENCE OF THE BWC**

13-14 SEPTEMBER 2016

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

OPENING STATEMENT BY

DR TAREK A. SHARIF

HEAD OF THE DEFENSE AND SECURITY DIVISION



Your Excellency, Ambassador Gary Quince, Head of European Union Delegation to the African Union,

Our distinguished guest and partner, Ambassador Dr György Molnár, President-Designate of the Eighth BWC Review Conference,

Distinguished representatives of the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention,

Distinguished representatives of AU Member States, international partners and UNREC,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the African Union, to the Africa Regional Workshop in Preparation for the 8th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention. At the outset, I wish to thank the Implementation Support Unit and the President-Designate of the Review Conference for their collaboration and support extended in organizing this event. Our sincere thanks also goes to the European Union, the Governments of Canada, Norway, and the International Law and Policy Institute for their generous contributions to this event. Last but not least, I would also like to extend our thanks to all the participants for their commitment and time to benefit from, and contribute to, enriching our deliberations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Biological Weapons Convention is fundamental to international efforts to address the threat posed by biological weapons – whether in the hands of governments or non-state actors. To remain effective, it must deal with all biological threats we face in the 21st century. Therefore, and through the upcoming Review Conference, we need to make real progress on effective implementation.

Thus, this workshop becomes critical to mobilize States Parties to the Convention for active participation in the 8th Review Conference in November this year. Indeed the workshop aims to increase awareness of the Review Conference and its significance for the future evolution of the Convention; stimulate dialogue on issues to be considered at the Review Conference; promote the development of proposals for new initiatives to be implemented after the Review Conference; as well as garner broad support for their adoption.

In this regard, I wish to note with satisfaction that several AU member States party to the Convention have been taking an active part in the preparatory process for the Review Conference by submitting, individually or jointly with other international partners, working papers containing proposals for enhanced implementation of the Convention covering aspects of Article VII implementation, confidence building, Facilitating cooperation to strengthen capacities against bio-risks, and future planning for the Implementation Support Unit. This indicates considerable interest on the part of AU Member States to make progress in the implementation of the Convention.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The African Union has remained keen on hosting this workshop, as it constitutes a step forward in the implementation of the Common African Defense and Security Policy, adopted by the 2nd Extra Ordinary Summit of the AU in 2004. The Common Policy recognizes that the accumulation, stockpiling, proliferation and manufacturing of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and their means of delivery, pose a threat to regional security and call for collective efforts by Member States to address their threat.

The Common Policy therefore mandates the Commission of the African Union to promote and encourage the strengthening and implementation of the regional and international instruments on disarmament and non-proliferation.

The role of the African Union is centered on the principle that universal adherence to the disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, including the Biological Weapons Convention, will serve to strengthen their effectiveness and authority and provide the required transparency and confidence-building measures. This would consequently ensure that regional and international resources are effectively channeled to enhance international cooperation where all states can equally benefit from the peaceful applications of nuclear, chemical and biological sciences and technology.

This message was reiterated by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, in her press release of March 2015 in which she commemorated the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention. In her message, the Chairperson emphasized that the national measures dictated by the Convention make an important contribution to strengthening public health, particularly in the areas of capacity building, improving bio-safety and bio-security, and enhancing capacities for surveillance of diseases and outbreaks.

Referring to the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak that had spread throughout West Africa and other countries in Africa and beyond, she also stressed the critical need for effective inter-state cooperation, emphasizing that in an increasingly interconnected world, such outbreaks pose a threat not only to health but to regional economy and

security. The Chairperson has, therefore, encouraged all AU Member States to ratify and accede to the Convention as early as possible.

In follow-up to the Chairperson's message, the African Union partnered with the Implementation Support Unit in convening a workshop in October 2015 focusing on the universalization of the Convention in Africa. I wish to seize this opportunity to congratulate Cote d'Ivoire and Angola for ratifying the Convention this year, bringing the number of States Parties in Africa to 41. I also wish to call upon the remaining 12 AU member States to become parties without further delay.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

During the course of this workshop, we will learn from the President-Designate, the Implementation Support Unit, and the other facilitators about the work of the Preparatory Committee, the different topics being discussed and proposal formulated for consideration, at the Review Conference. I wish to encourage all of you to participate actively in the discussions and contribute constructive ideas for the overall progress in the implementation of the Convention and to ensure that Africa has a strong and unified voice at the Review Conference later this year.

In concluding, I wish to thank you all once again for being here, and wish you all fruitful deliberations. Thank you for your kind attention.