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PRESS RELEASE

(For Immediate Release)

AU Special Representative presides over the handover ceremony of AMISOM Military Command

Mogadishu 16 December 2013; Lieutenant General Silas Ntigurirwa from Burundi National Defense Forces (BNDF) has today taken command of the military component of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), following a handover ceremony presided over by the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia, Ambassador Mahamat Saleh Annadif. The ceremony was also attended by the Minister of Defense of the Federal Government of Somalia-Honorable Abdihakim Faqi, the Minister of National Defense and Former Combatants of Burundi-Honorable Pontien Gaciyubwenge who also represented Troop Contributing Countries to AMISOM, the UN SRSG for Somalia-Ambassador Nicholas Kay, the EU Special Envoy for Somalia-Ambassador Michelle Cervone and the AU Head of Peace Support Division-Mr. Sivuyile Bam.

The AU Special Representative congratulated Lt. General Ntigurirwa on his appointment, saying that his experience and knowledge would be of great value to the international effort in restoring peace and stability in Somalia while thanking the Outgoing Force Commander Lt. General Andrew Gutti for his dedication to the mission during his tenure at the helm.

Born in 1968, Lt. Gen. Silas Ntigurirwa brings vast experience from the Burundian army, in which he has served in different capacities, with the last posting being the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of National Defense and Former Combatants. He comes in at a time when the United Nations Security Council approved an additional 4,400 troops for the mission, boosting its number from the current 17,731 to 22,196. The troops currently serving under AMISOM in Somalia come from Djibouti, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Uganda.

Lt. General Gutti had led the AU peacekeeping forces since May 2nd last year. During his leadership, AMISOM forces supporting the Somali National Army have registered significant achievements countrywide allowing political process to take place.

During the handover ceremony, Lt General Gutti was recognized for his good service,

commitment and gallantry. He was lauded for the significant progress made in pushing out the extremist group al-Shabaab during his tenure, which led to the capturing of key strategic positions in South and Central Somalia. "I would like to express my gratitude for your service and contribution towards peace in Somalia. You have set an example and the new AMISOM leadership should maintain the momentum" said Ambassador Annadif.

Lt General Gutti said "With the current set up I see Somalia gaining its former glory. Within the shortest time Somalia has been recognized by the international bodies, missions have come here for the first time and there are over 30 missions operating here now. I envision that this will continue and with the extra troops to be deployed, AMISOM will achieve much more".

On his part, the incoming Force Commander, vowed to continue building the momentum in order to achieve the objectives of the Mission and help bring about security and stability to Somalia and to the region at large adding that the recent AMISOM expansion will enable the troops to liberate more areas and serve Somalia better.

The Minister of Defense of the Federal Government of Somalia, Honorable Abdihakim Faqi expressed his confidence in the incoming Force Commander and thanked the outgoing Force Commander for his role especially during the period when AMISOM supported the Somali National Forces in kicking-out Al-Shabaab terrorists from strategic areas.

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