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PRESS RELEASE

THE AFRICAN UNION REITERATES ITS READINESS TO IMMEDIATELY DEPLOY HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVERS AND MILITARY EXPERTS TO BURUNDI

Addis Ababa, 18 July 2015: As part of the follow-up and implementation of the relevant decisions of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), the AU Commission wishes to reiterate its readiness to immediately deploy human rights observers and military experts to Burundi.

It is to be recalled that, in the communiqué adopted at its meeting held in Johannesburg on 13 June 2015, the PSC requested the immediate deployment of human rights observers and other civilian personnel to Burundi, as agreed in its communiqué of 14 May 2015, as well as that of military experts. The human rights observers are responsible for monitoring the human rights situation on the ground and reporting possible violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. As to the military experts, they are responsible for verifying, in collaboration with the Government and other stakeholders, the disarmament of militias and other armed groups.

Pursuant to these decisions, on 3 July 2015, the Commission formally contacted the Burundian authorities, informing them of its intention to deploy, beginning from 8 July 2015, a start-up team of human rights observers and military experts from the Commission. The Commission provided the names and other relevant details of the members of the team. In response, the Government of Burundi, in a note verbale dated 4 July 2015, requested the postponement of the deployment to any other date after 15 July 2015, when the presidential election was to be held before being eventually postponed to 21 July 2015. In addition, the Government of Burundi, in a subsequent note verbale dated 8 July 2015, requested that, prior to the deployment, a Memorandum be signed with the Commission to define the rights and obligations of each party.

On 15 July 2015, the Commission, again, formally contacted the Burundian authorities and proposed to deploy the human rights observers and military experts starting from 17 July 2015. In addition, and in view of the urgency of the situation and the pronouncements made both by the AU PSC and the East African Community (EAC), the Commission requested the Government of Burundi not to make the deployment subject to the prior conclusion of a Memorandum.

The Commission notes that, in its reply dated 16 July 2015, the Government of Burundi has reiterated its readiness to receive the mission of human rights observers and military experts, in

the shortest possible time. It also notes its decision to no longer make the deployment subject to the prior conclusion of a Memorandum.

As stated above, the Commission was planning to commence the deployment of the concerned personnel starting from 17 July 2015. However, in view of the position of the Government of Burundi, as expressed in its note verbale of 16 July 2015, that the members of the start-up team, who are holders of AU diplomatic passports or laissez-passer, should also have entry visas to Burundi, the Commission is compelled to wait for the issuance of these visas before going ahead with the deployment. The Commission will initiate the required formalities from Monday 20 July 2015, and will commence the deployment as soon as the visas have been issued.

The Commission would like to point out that, in parallel with this deployment, a process has been initiated for the recruitment of civilian staff and the generation, from AU Member States, of military experts specifically dedicated to the mission envisaged in Burundi. Moreover, the Commission would like to emphasize that the human rights observers and military experts will work closely with the relevant Burundian institutions and all other stakeholders. It is understood that this collaboration shall be in full respect of the independence of the concerned personnel, which is a prerequisite for the credible and transparent discharge of their mandates as determined by the PSC.