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**HIGH LEVEL MEETING FOR THE AU-GERMANY PROJECT ON ENHANCED SALW CONTROL AND
PHYSICAL SECURITY AND STOCKPILE MANAGEMENT IN THE GREATER SAHEL REGION**

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

16 OCTOBER 2015

STATEMENT
BY
AMBASSADOR SMAÏL CHERGUI
AU COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

Excellency, Ambassador Susanne Baumann, Deputy Federal Commissioner for Disarmament at the German Federal Foreign Office;

Excellency, Ms. Hiroute Gebre Sellassie, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Sahel;

Excellencies, Ambassadors and representatives of AU Member States and G7;

Distinguished Representatives of the United Nations, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Bodies;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am pleased to welcome you to the High level Meeting for the AU-Germany Project on Enhanced Small Arms and Light Weapons Control and Physical Security and Stockpile Management in the Greater Sahel Region. I would like in particular to welcome among us Ambassador Susanne Baumann, Deputy Federal Commissioner for Disarmament at the German Federal Foreign Office.

I wish, on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, and on my own behalf, to thank the Federal Government of Germany for its continued support and collaboration. Germany's partnership with the AU in the area of peace and security has grown stronger over the years and our cooperation in the area of disarmament and arms control holds considerable potential for enhancing security and stability in our regions and the globe.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The objective of our meeting today is to consider the report and recommendations of the meeting of experts, held in September 2015, regarding enhanced control of illicit small arms and ammunition and physical security and stockpile management in the Greater Sahel region.

This issue is of critical importance to sustainable security in a region that has long suffered from political instability, recurrent rebellions, crime and terrorism. These factors have not only contributed to but also led to the erosion of resilience to deal with extreme poverty, chronic food insecurity, endemic and epidemic diseases, as well as other environmental challenges making it one of the world's poorest regions with the lowest development levels.

The African Union has remained in the forefront of the regional and international response efforts to the crises in the region. We recognize the need for a robust, coherent and integrated approach to tackle the complex and multifaceted challenges which includes conflict management and resolution, trans-border security, governance and sustainable development. These principles are embodied in the African Union Strategy for the Sahel region adopted a year ago by the Peace and Security Council.

On the security aspect, the African Union inceptioned the Nouakchott Process in 2013 to enhance security cooperation and operationalize the African Peace and Security Architecture. Through this process, various decision makers and security sector stakeholders have come together to address a range of issues, including the threat posed by Boko Haram and the establishment of the Multi-National Joint Task Force; support to the UN Mission in Mali in effectively fulfilling its mandate and addressing trans-border movement of criminal and terrorist groups; enhanced exchange of intelligence between national agencies to combat crime and terrorism as well as joint border patrols and mixed border units.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The insecurity and instability in the Sahel region has been greatly enabled by the widespread of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition which originate from various sources, including circulation of arms from other conflicts on the continent, regional and international trafficking networks as well as arms diverted from government held stockpiles. This has allowed rebels, criminals and terrorists to significantly boost and expand their power. As we have witnessed, especially in Libya and Mali, arms and ammunition availability significantly determine the dynamics of a crisis, its magnitude and dimensions.

This problem has been duly recognized by the Peace and Security Council and the different forums of the Nouakchott Process. In this regard the AU Commission, in close collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities and the relevant regional bodies, has continued to support Member States in implementing the regional and international framework against the illicit proliferation of small arms including promoting the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty.

In recent years, however, evidence gathered highlighted the fact that government held stockpiles remain prominent sources of arms entering illicit circulation, either through theft, corruption, pilferage or resale. This is due to the absence of proper physical and regulatory controls as well as accountability measures. Often times such diverted weapons end up in the hands of non-state actors, including rebels, criminals and terrorist, and thereby undermining national and regional security efforts.

In addition to the serious threat caused by small arms and light weapons, there has been a rise in the use of improvised explosive devices (IED) in the region and against peacekeepers, causing serious injuries and casualties among both troops and civilians and causing damage to infrastructure and troop capabilities. According to the United Nations, their main charges and boosters are frequently sourced from conventional weapons ammunition. This further highlights the critical need to enhance physical protection and security measures in relation to ammunition.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is within this context that the African Union has initiated a project earlier this year, in collaboration with the Federal Government of Germany and the support of the Bonn International Centre for Conversion, to enhance small arms and ammunition control and physical security and stockpile management – or PSSM. The objective of the project is to mitigate the risk of diversion, misuse and mismanagement of government held stockpiles of arms and ammunition as well as mitigate the risk of un-planned explosions in munitions sites through effective and sustainable PSSM practices that are owned and led by Member States through adequate operational resources and technical expertise.

The project takes into consideration the fact that a number of donors, UN agencies, international and non-governmental organizations are active in the region providing support to Member States in the area of small arms and ammunition PSSM. However, there is recognition that such support is often poorly coordinated and unsustainable, which undermines the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

The project therefore aims to coordinate the efforts of the various national stakeholders and support providers through better information sharing; fostering a common understanding of the gaps, needs and priorities; the joint identification of priority interventions; the optimal allocation of resources and capitalizing on the respective advantage and expertise of the different actors.

The project also aims to promote the sustainability of the support being provided by donors and implementing agencies, including through integrating best practices such as support to institutional building and the effective transfer of expertise and capacities.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The rationale for the project, its objectives and implementation mechanisms was discussed in depth during the preparatory meeting in May 2015 with Regional Economic Communities and regional Bodies with a small arms mandate, as well as during the experts meeting convened jointly by the AU Commission and Germany in early September.

The experts discussed the ongoing PSSM projects in the region, identified the challenges for implementation and coordination, and recommended a set of measures and means to enhance coordination, national ownership and sustainability.

It is therefore the objective of today's meeting to consider the report and recommendations developed by the experts. We hope that the meeting will

endorse these recommendations and voice its concurrence with, and support for the establishment of the coordination mechanism and platform suggested therein. The report and recommendations will be presented later on today in more detail before the panel and plenary discussions.

I wish you fruitful deliberation and count on your endorsement and commitment to enable the AU Commission extend the support and facilitation required to ensure coordinated, effective and sustainable action against illicit small arms proliferation and circulation in the region.

Thank you.