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**REMARKS BY THE COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY AT THE UNITED
NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON THE MAINTENANCE OF
INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY: TRAFFICKING OF PERSONS IN CONFLICT
SITUATIONS**
21 November 2017

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, I want to thank you, for convening this important meeting under the agenda item *“Maintenance of international peace and security: trafficking of persons in conflict situations”*.

Mr. President,

I will focus my presentation on the situation in Africa. The AU Peace and Security Council is currently seized with fifteen (15) conflict situations on the continent. These include countries engaged in war, or are experiencing post-conflict tensions, while a dozen face chronic vulnerabilities. In each of these situations, trafficking remains an issue that continues to erode the human dignity of individuals in particular women and children.

The stories we hear from the victims in countries such as Libya, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Somalia to name a few are harrowing. The Government of Burundi has recorded more than 356 women and girls victim of human trafficking since January 2017. The tragedy is that once they reach their destination human rights abuses continue sometimes below the radar screen. Although the phenomenon exists everywhere, the populations in conflict situations are more vulnerable to sex trafficking, child sex trafficking, forced labor, domestic servitude, forced child labor, unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers. According to a

just released report by the United Nations' International Labour organisation, Africa has the highest rate of modern slavery, with 7.6 per 1,000 people.

Mr President,

Allow me, to touch on the plight of the migrants in Libya. The African Union learned with dismay of reports on the auctioning of African migrants in Libya as slaves. We were lost for words when we saw those images. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat has strongly condemned these despicable acts which are at odds with the ideals of the Founding Fathers of our Organization and relevant African and international instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. In addition, the AU is deeply concerned by the inhumane conditions across Libya where migrants are being held. The business of smuggling migrants has become so lucrative that it has led to clashes between rival factions who are in essence rent-seekers promising some partners that they can contain the issue of migration in Libya.

The African Union has requested the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to urgently launch an investigation in support of the measures announced by the Libyan authorities and to submit its conclusions as soon as possible. The AU also intends to dispatch an envoy to Libya for consultations with the Government and other stakeholders, to agree on practical steps to address the plight of African migrants in Libya.

Mr President,

The African Union believes that ending trafficking of persons in conflict situations must start with the resolution of conflicts. We are working relentlessly to prevent and mediate conflicts and to address the root causes. Indeed, building on the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in peace and security, the UN and the AU are currently in the process of developing a AU-UN Framework for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The African Union also maintains that a multi-pronged, but tailored and context-specific, approach that address the complexities and nuances of this problem is the only way to make concrete and sustainable progress. The AU therefore focuses on both prevention and response.

The preventive approach focuses on addressing conditions conducive to human trafficking. Interventions should be tailored to address the particular vulnerabilities and provide meaningful and effective alternatives for livelihoods and political participation.

The AU Commission is undertaking various initiatives aimed at addressing the structural vulnerabilities of member states through the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework. The AU Commission is also supporting Member States in strengthening their national peace infrastructure to enable them respond to local realities and potential threats.

Within the Framework of the AU Border Program, the AU working with development partners has helped some of its Member States in the Sahel and East Africa regions to enhance government presence in the border regions by extending public and social services.

The AU has also adopted several legal and normative instruments that are designed to tackle the trafficking of human beings and the smuggling of migrants. These instruments have provided the basis for Member States to enact anti-trafficking legislation which has protected and rescued a great number of victims.

The second component focuses on strengthening the security response measures. Significant progress has already been made through PSOs and ad-hoc security arrangements. However, there are significant gaps in the criminal justice response to human trafficking, which include outdated legislation, and weak institutional capacities to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate human trafficking cases.

The Nouakchott and Djibouti Processes for Enhancing Security Cooperation in the Sahel and East Africa regions, established under the auspices of the AU, has served as a catalyst for robust cooperation between the intelligence services of the countries of the respective regions. These processes have allowed different institutions develop a shared understanding of the common security threats and devise collaborative response measures to address them.

The AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation – AFRIPOL – is now fully operational. AFRIPOL is established to enhance cooperation and coordination between police

and other law enforcement agencies of Member States at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels to coherently and effectively combat all forms of crime. AFRIPOL will also play a critical role in training and building the capacities of law enforcement agencies to confront the range of emerging transnational threats including human trafficking.

We are also working on a framework that will provide comprehensive victim support services for those affected by human trafficking. These include health services addressing the long-term needs of those physically injured and psychological support for the victims and their families. This is in line with the 3P approach which is the paradigm of preventing the crime, prosecuting traffickers and protecting the victims.

Mr President,

Each of our initiatives to combat human trafficking are founded on the realization that the challenges of human trafficking must be addressed from both regional and global perspectives, and must be situated within the context of sustainable development. Unfortunately, our efforts to prevent, protect and assist victims of human trafficking, continue to be hindered by the following challenges:

First, although we have a shared analysis on many conflicts situations on the continent, we do not always have a common strategy. Take Libya for example, we all remember the pre-intervention period in the country. The African Union wanted a mediated solution but this was prevented. Even today, the repercussions of the

current situation in Libya on neighbouring African countries is not fully appreciated. We were not heard before, we continue to not be heard but we are hopeful that this will change.

Second, we must address the governance deficit and lack of socio-economic development on the continent that has lead our youth to risk their lives across the Sahara and Mediterranean Sea in search of a better tomorrow or get involved with terrorist groups that can provide income and a sense of belonging. Let's make sure that this time we move from words to action and ensure that we meet the goals set for 2030.

Third, there is a lack of cooperation among the various actors involved in addressing the issue of human trafficking. It is therefore very important for our two organizations to hold regular consultations at the highest leadership level.

Fourth, there is an "urgency gap" related to the low level of importance accorded to human trafficking; more needs to be done to mobilize international, regional and national actors to bring the issue at the top of our agendas;

Finally, there is a policy implementation gap, where policies at the national, regional, continental and global level are not implemented. Let me touch again on the situation in Libya, the slavery camps need to be dismantled without delay, the criminal networks destroyed immediately, those behind these atrocious crimes brought to justice. It is also our expectation that the UNHCR should establish a permanent presence in Libya to assist the victims of trafficking. We are no longer

in a situation of failing to provide assistance to person in danger but are condemning these young men and women to death if we do not take action.

Mr President,

Let me conclude by saying that our common humanity is at stake, the expectations to address the scourge of Human trafficking immense and time is not on our side. We owe it to the victims of this tragedy who have been suffering for far too long.

I thank you for your kind attention.