



Embassy  
of the Federal Republic of Germany  
Addis Ababa

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT ORGANIZE THE 'TOPPING OUT' CEREMONY OF THE AU PEACE AND SECURITY BUILDING**

**Addis Ababa, 7 August 2012:** The new African Union (AU) Peace and Security Building, a donation by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, which amounts to about 27 million Euros, celebrated today its project milestone in a grand topping out ceremony held at the AU compound.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of the AU Commission, the German Embassy and the *Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), as well as by AU staff and the workers involved in this project.

'Topping out' is an old German tradition going as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when churches and cathedrals were built. The ceremony takes place when the roof of a building structure is in the process of being prepared to cover it. It is also meant to acknowledge that no lives have been lost during the construction process.

Speaking during the ceremony, Mr. Martin Hansen, Director-General of the GIZ International Services, thanked all the women and men who dedicated time, skills and energy to build this structure for the AU. He also expressed appreciation to the AU for its commitment and cooperation in this project.

On her part, Ms. Irene Biontino, Counselor at the German Embassy in Ethiopia, stressed the close cooperation that exists between the AU and Germany, which, beyond peace and security, covers other areas such as good governance, energy, water, science and education. She underlined that the Peace and Security Building is one of the most demanding project of the German cooperation with the AU.

El Ghassim Wane, Director of the AU Peace and Security Department, expressed, on behalf of the Commission's leadership, AU's gratitude to the German Government for its generous donation. He added that the completion, early next year, of this landmark project would go a long way in enhancing AU's capacity to meet the challenges of peace and security on the continent.

Over 300 construction workers and master craftsmen who participated in the construction of the building over the last one and a half year, received recognition during the ceremony.

## **Note to the Editors**

**About the AU request to the German Government:** During the Annual Consultation between the AU, the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the G8 member countries and other AU partners, held in Addis Ababa, in April 2005, the partners agreed on the need to establish an AU strategic level peace support operations capability in Addis Ababa, including infrastructure and communications. This was reiterated during the follow-up technical meeting held in October 2005. In the course of the preparations for the Annual Consultation held in Addis Ababa, in May 2007, the issue was discussed with the German presidency of the G8. In August 2007, the Commission formally requested Germany to provide the required support. On 28 April 2008, the German Foreign Minister wrote to the Chairperson of the Commission to formally confirm that Germany would build the required facility.

The request was informed by the greater role being played by the AU in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts on the continent. As a result of this situation, the AU has significantly increased the staff of the Peace and Security Department (PSD). In the process, it became evident that the available office and operating space was no longer able to cope with the needs of the AU. A new building was required to accommodate the increasing number of staff and to provide the PSD with the necessary tools to effectively carry out its mandate.

**About the Peace and Security Building:** Spread across 13,500 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space, the new Peace and Security building will include offices for up to 360 employees. It will also include a plenary hall for the meetings of the Peace and Security Council, a Situation Room and an Operations Room, as well as a library, meeting facilities and space for auxiliary functions. Furthermore, the building will also house the Continental Early Warning System.

The construction of the building shell has involved the delivery and transformation into concrete of 5,000 tons of cement – this is equivalent to 125,000 bags of cement; and the placing of 1,300 tons of steel into the structure – when all that steel is lined up, it would come to 1,450 kms, which is equivalent to the distance between Addis Ababa and Mombasa, in Kenya. 300 men and women have worked on the site 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, for the last year. This means that 3.3 million hours were needed to erect the building. The new building will meet international design standards for environmental sustainability, incorporating climate-friendly and energy-efficient technologies, which will help to lower the maintenance costs.

**About topping out ceremony:** Common in Germany (*Richtfest*), topping out refers, in building construction, to a ceremony that is organized to mark the overall completion of a building structure. It is also organized when the last beam is placed at the top of a building or at an intermediate point. Generally, the ceremony includes the placing of an evergreen tree upon the structure to symbolize growth and bring luck, as well as the raising of flags. The practice originates from an ancient religious tradition in Germany and Scandinavian countries, which consists of placing a tree on top of a new building to appease the tree-dwelling spirits of their ancestors that had been displaced.

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