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**PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
575TH MEETING**

**11 FEBRUARY 2016
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

PSC/PR/BR (DLXXV....)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), at its 575th meeting, held on 11 February 2016, in Addis Ababa, dedicated an open session to the theme: natural resources and conflicts in Africa. Council listened to a presentation by the Oxfam Representative to the AU, as well as statements from AU Members, international partners, specialized institutions and civil society organizations.

Council, while recognizing the importance of natural resources in economic growth and development in Africa, stressed that they also present particular challenges for countries affected by and vulnerable to conflict. Council, drawing lessons from past and ongoing conflicts and crises on the continent, stressed that weak management and inequitable distribution of these resources can be, among others, a key factor in triggering, financing and prolonging conflicts. In this respect, Council expressed concern that in most of the protracted conflicts in Africa, the issue of access, control and distribution of natural resources constitute a major underlying cause that should effectively be neutralized.

Expressing concern over the phenomenon of terrorism affecting several parts of Africa, Council emphasized the need to take necessary steps to prevent terrorist organizations and armed groups from accessing and using natural resources to fund their activities.

Council stressed the imperative need for effective and transparent management, as well as for equitable distribution of a country's natural resources that ensures the interest and wellbeing of the local population, communities and the country at large. Therefore, Council recognized that fairness, transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources is critical to preventing conflict and promoting sustainable development in Africa. In the same vein, Council stressed the need for zero tolerance policy in combatting corruption.

Council condemned the illegal exploitation of natural resources of Western Sahara and considered it as a hostile act likely to perpetuate the conflict and colonialism in Western Sahara. In this regard, Council reiterated the relevant decisions of the United Nations and the African Union, in particular decision Assembly /AU/Dec.583(XXV) adopted by the Assembly at its 25th Ordinary Session, urging the UN Security Council to fully assume its responsibilities, as well as effectively address the issues of the respect of human rights and the illegal exploitation of the Territory's natural resources.

Council welcomed global and African efforts made to ensure better regulation in the exploitation of and trade in African natural resources, stressing that these efforts led to the establishment of important norms, through instruments such as the Kimberley Process and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. In this respect, Council recalled the African Mining Vision (AMV) adopted by the 12th ordinary session of the AU Assembly, held in February 2009, which, among others, requested the AU Commission to integrate the peace and security dimension of natural resources into its existing conflict prevention and early warning process, as well as into conflict management, peacemaking and peace support policies and programmes.

Council, more specifically, stressed the need for the Commission to mainstream the issue of natural resources in the AU tools for structural prevention of conflict, as well as in mediation processes and peace agreements.

Council urged Members States to develop the necessary legal regulatory framework, as requested by the AMV, with a view to promoting policies on natural resources that contribute to reinforce national cohesion through fair and inclusive exploitation and distribution of natural resources, as well as through beneficiation to the entire population. Council reiterated AU condemnation of illegal exploitation of natural resources, including poaching of wildlife, particularly elephants, rhinos and fisheries.

Council also urged international partners, transnational corporations, private sector, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, to support the promotion of transparency, equity and development-oriented governance of natural resources in Africa, in a manner that contributes to prevention or resolution of conflicts in the continent. Council encouraged Members States to exchange best practices in exploitation and trade of natural resources that contribute to enhancing conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction and development in Africa.

Council requested the Commission, with the support of AU partners, to extend the necessary assistance to Member States in their efforts aimed at reinforcing their respective legal framework with a view to enhancing the governance and management of their natural resources. In this respect, Council also requested the Commission to develop a code of conduct for the exploitation, use and trade of African natural resources that encompass, in a holistic approach, socio-economic development, peace and security.

Council agreed to hold an annual open session on the issue of natural resources, illicit financial flows and conflict in Africa.