

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR AS MINTY, AFCONE CHAIRPERSON, AT THE
OPENING OF THE SECOND AFCONE MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, 26 JULY 2012

Commissioners,

I extend a warm welcome to you, at the second meeting of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE). Although we have a full agenda for this one day meeting, through our collective efforts we will have a most productive meeting.

We thank The AU Commission for the inspiring words of welcome, and thank the Department of Peace and Security, for their dedication and assistance in facilitation the work of AFCONE.

The presence of those observing our meeting is much appreciated, as your involvement with the mandate and activities of AFCONE are indispensable.

Commissioners,

Since our first meeting held on 4 May 2011, progress has been made to operationalise AFCONE, and the voice of AFCONE has been heard in various multilateral meetings.

In this regard, I am pleased to report that steady progress is being made with the negotiations on the agreement with South Africa on the hosting of AFCONE. The formal establishment of the AFCONE Headquarters will also be guided by the agreed budget of AFCONE, and the appointment of the Executive Secretary and staff.

Pending the formal establishment of the AFCONE Headquarters in South Africa, the functioning of AFCONE, and specifically its Secretariat, should not be hampered by this temporary absence of a physical office in South Africa.

You will appreciate that the finalisation of this issue will take some time as strict regulatory processes need to be followed. In the interim, office space for AFCONE can be provided at the AU Commission until the formal opening of the AFCONE Headquarters takes place.

At the First Conference of States Parties to the Pelindaba Treaty, held on 4 November 2010, the Conference requested the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint an Executive Secretary in terms of the Treaty's provisions.

Progress has been made with the appointment of the Executive Secretary. This position has been advertised and potential candidates have been interviewed. In terms of the Pelindaba Treaty, the designation of the Executive Secretary shall be made by the Chairperson of the AU Commission in consultation with the Chairperson of AFCONE.

Such consultations will take place in due course.

I am also pleased to report that AFCONE has been represented in some important multilateral meetings.

In this regard, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) invited AFCONE to share the experience of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone of possible relevance to the creation of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East. This Forum was held in Vienna, Austria, from 21-22 November 2011, where I shared such experiences in the context of Africa on behalf of AFCONE, together with the representatives of the other nuclear-weapon-free zones.

This Forum was of particular importance and relevance to Africa as it is noted in the preamble of the Pelinbaba Treaty that the establishment of other nuclear-weapon-free zones, especially in the Middle East, would enhance the security of States Parties to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.

This Forum concluded successfully and one of the conclusions of the Chairperson of the Forum was that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones was possible despite serious obstacles, such as geopolitical complexities, lack of trust, and an often lengthy process of entry into force of such treaties. This conclusion is also reflection of the experience in establishing the African nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Another meeting at which AFCONE was represented was the First Preparatory meeting for the Third Conference of States Parties and Signatories that Established Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and Mongolia. This meeting was held on 27 April 2012 in Vienna, Austria, and, in my capacity as Chairperson, a statement was delivered on behalf of AFCONE.

These conferences of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and Mongolia play an important role in fostering closer co-operation between these Zones, thereby achieving our mutual objective of nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and enhancing the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Commissioners,

At our first meeting we extensively deliberated upon the procedural aspects needed to operationalise AFCONE.

The expectation at this meeting is that we will conclude these discussions and move to adopt our rules of procedure, the final structure of AFCONE, our programme of work, and finalise our recommendation to the next Conference of States Parties, including on the budget and scale of assessment.

The Conference of States Parties entrusted us with the collective responsibility to ensure compliance with the undertakings contained in the Pelindaba Treaty.

This compliance not only deals with the Treaty's nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation undertakings, but also extends to promoting regional and sub-regional and international co-operation on the peaceful uses of nuclear sciences and technology.

Therefore, regarding our programme of work, we already had an extensive debate thereon at our previous meeting. You will recall that we agreed that the work of AFCONE should be divided into four key areas, namely; 1) Monitoring States Parties' compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations; 2) Nuclear and radiation safety and security; 3) Nuclear sciences and applications and 4) Partnerships and technical co-operation, which includes outreach and promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Regarding the monitoring of compliance, the Treaty placed an obligation on us to develop the reporting format for States Parties to fulfil their obligation to submit the required information to AFCONE. These reports will be a key instrument in the monitoring of compliance.

Due to recent events, including the tragedy at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan, there are rightful concerns regarding nuclear safety and security. The IAEA has taken a leading role in dealing with these issues.

AFCONE could play a useful role to facilitate the implementation by African States of the relevant legally binding instruments and codes of conduct on nuclear safety and security, and have in place their respective nuclear safety and security infrastructures. The Forum of Nuclear Regulatory Bodies in Africa is the key partner of AFCONE in this regard, and we should seek closer co-operation with this Forum.

An important aspect of our work is to promote nuclear sciences and applications. In this regard, the African Regional Cooperative Agreement for Research, Development and Training related to Nuclear Science and Technology (AFRA), already makes a valuable contribution towards enlarging the contribution of nuclear energy towards the development of our Continent.

In terms of the Treaty, AFCONE would need to request the IAEA for a report on the activities of AFRA. It should be recalled that the membership of AFCONE and of AFRA may differ, but the objectives on promoting nuclear science and technology are essentially the same.

Therefore, the consideration of reports by AFRA will provide AFCONE with valuable information, not only to avoid duplication of activities, but also to foster closer co-operation.

Commissioners,

AFCONE have also been invited to work closely with relevant organisations including the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (OPANAL). The European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) also stands ready to co-operate with AFCONE to the benefit of the Continent.

Furthermore, the Treaty has established a special relationship between AFCONE and the IAEA. In addition, as the Treaty also prohibits the testing of a nuclear explosive device, the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation, is another important international organisation with whom AFCONE needs to establish a formal relationship.

At this meeting we could usefully explore ways and how to deepen our co-operation with these organisations and bodies to our mutual benefit.

In conclusion, each of us represents a specific region on our Continent. The unique perspectives, needs and aspirations of the various regions, in the context of the implementation of the Treaty, can be brought together here at our meetings, which will guide our deliberations and decisions.

Through your dedicated participation in this Second meeting of AFCONE, we will enhance the implementation of the Pelindaba Treaty, thereby significantly contributing to the development of our Continent and realizing our common vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

I thank you