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MARITIME SECURITY AND SAFETY IN AFRICA: MOVING FROM TALKING TO TAKING CONCRETE ACTION

Addis Ababa, 6 April 2010 – African experts on maritime security and safety are gathering on 6 and 7 April 2010, at the headquarters of the African Union (AU), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to share information on maritime security and safety among AU Member states and with partners and to consider the African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIM-Strategy), a step toward a holistic policy to address this matter. Experts will therefore cover threats and vulnerabilities such as natural disasters and environmental degradation, environmental crimes, illegal fishing, oil bunkering, money laundering, illegal arms and drug traffic, human trafficking, maritime terrorism and piracy and armed robbery.

In her opening remarks, Mrs Elham Ibrahim, AU Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, recalled that “for years African states have been mostly concerned by the declining capacity of their maritime industry”. However, recently, the growing menace of unlawful activities on African waters and the rapid escalation of piracy activities off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea has meant that more attention be also given to matters of maritime security. It also served as a “wake-up call to the leadership in Africa to take concrete action to rid the continent of these scourges which are undermining economic activity and the image of the continent”.

“As we move from talking to taking concrete action”, said Mrs Ibrahim, “my message has been of underscoring on the necessity of putting in place practical measures that would lead us to achieve real milestones in addressing each and every issue related to the current maritime security situation in Africa”.

Speaking on behalf of Malawi, which is chairing the Union, Mr Ernest Makawa, emphasized on the necessity to take action for maritime safety and security in order to protect fisheries which make “a vital contribution to the food and nutritional security of 200 million Africans and provide income for over 10 million”. He invited the experts to bear in mind that a threat-free maritime domain is a prerequisite “for an integrated and prosperous Africa”. In this regard, he added that there must be a corresponding African endeavor to address maritime security while the variety of actors threatening Africa’s maritime domain continues to grow. Mr Makawa concluded by addressing the three steps that the AIM-Strategy should achieve: suitability, acceptability and feasibility.

The experts meeting on maritime security and safety will end on Wednesday, April 7, 2010. Journalists are invited to attend the press conference which will mark the end of this event at 16h30, in the Media center of the AU.