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OPENING STATEMENT BY

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AT

THE SECOND RETREAT OF THE PANEL OF THE WISE WITH SIMILAR REGIONAL

MECHANISMS ON THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF

THE PAN AFRICAN NETWORK OF THE WISE (PanWise)

11-12 APRIL 2013

ADDIS ABABA

**Excellencies, Members and Friends of the Panel of the Wise;
 Excellencies, Members of Similar Mechanisms Involved in Mediation and Conflict Prevention
 at Regional and National Levels,
 Excellencies, High-Level African Personalities,
 Your Excellency, Ambassador Dr. Joram Biswaro, Chairperson of the Peace and Security
 Council for the Month of April,
 Distinguished Experts,
 Dear Participants.**

At the outset, and on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the entire Commission, and on my own behalf, I wish to take this opportunity to welcome you all to the AU Commission, in Addis Ababa, to participate in this Retreat that brings together members of the Panel of the Wise of the African Union, members of similar mechanisms from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and senior delegates who actively work in the area of conflict prevention and mediation in Africa. I am very grateful and delighted by your positive responses to take part in this Retreat aimed at advancing means to uplift the performance of our respective institutions, working towards more collective efforts to take forward the agenda of conflict prevention in Africa.

I would also like to convey our thanks to our partners and experts who have been greatly cooperating, in various ways, with both the Panel of the Wise and the AU at large, on one hand, and the rest of the institutions represented here, on the other. In that connection, I would like to acknowledge and thank in particular the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Conflicts (ACCORD), and the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) for their support in this particular endeavor.

Excellencies, Dear Participants

Turning to the subject matter, it should first be observed that this Retreat, and the idea to establish the Pan African Network of the Wise (PanWise), is taking place at an opportune time, on the eve of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the OAU, celebrated this whole year under the theme of **“Pan Africanism and African Renaissance”**. Therefore, let us reflect on the background to the creation of the PanWise.

It will be recalled that since the establishment of the Organization of African Unity, various efforts were made towards preventing conflicts and mediating in long-lasting ways the conflicts on the continent; with various degrees of success. Among the main constraints were the lack of proper policies, strategies, instruments and structures at both continental and regional levels; that would have also advanced closer cooperation between the OAU and Regional Groupings - that today are Regional Economic Communities. The organ that could have worked on mediation and conflict prevention under the OAU, namely the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration, could not be effectively put in place, while the Regional Groupings were not involved in pursuing collective political agendas and were operating independently.

However, that situation evolved quickly. A new structure was put in place in 1993, the Central Organ and its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; and under the

African Economic Community (AEC), RECs were officially adopted as the Community's pillars. A specific mechanism was then introduced for enhanced collaboration with RECs that came to be known as the **"Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and the Regional Economic Communities for the Implementation of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community"**. Still, however, the obtained results were not very impressive, as there was no viable and effective continental framework to advance the agenda of peace and security in Africa.

Under the African Union's current dispensation, the structural arrangements have improved significantly. Besides the Constitutive Act, the role of RECs as the AU pillars has been recognized and organized. More importantly, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), has been established. Its Protocol, that has adopted the Panel of the Wise as one of its pillars specifically in conflict prevention, has also stressed the need for improved relationship between the AU and RECs. Article 16 of the Protocol has identified Regional Mechanisms for conflict prevention as part of the overall security architecture of the African Union (officially known as the African Peace and Security Architecture - APSA). Moreover, its sub-Article 16(9) has authorized the drafting of a memorandum of understanding between the parties to guide their relations in this particular aspect of peace and security.

Thus, the **Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa** signed in 2008 has emphasized closer cooperation between the AU and Regional Mechanisms. Article VI of the Memorandum has gone as far as calling for the RECs to establish similar structure, like the Panel of the Wise, for better coordination and harmonization of strategies and activities.

Meanwhile, for the first time in the history of this continental organization, and under the auspices of the Panel of the Wise, the African Union has since 2009 developed a Mediation Strategy for the AU in order to enable the Union conduct mediation and conflict prevention in a professional manner for better performance. This is in addition to other programs undertaken by the Panel of the Wise such as thematic reflections that has involved it in undertaking pre-election and fact-finding missions; consultations with the PSC and the Chairperson of the AU Commission and so on, that all fall under the implementation of APSA.

Accordingly, it is in the implementation of those instruments and strategies that collaboration between the AU and RECs, on one hand, and between the AU Panel of the Wise and similar Regional Mechanisms, on the other, is being developed.

In the process, members of the Panel of the Wise started various joint activities with their counterparts at RECs level. For instance, regional panels have been attending Panels meetings and jointly conducting pre-election assessment as well as fact-finding missions. For instance, the missions undertaken by the Panel with COMESA to Egypt and Kenya; the joint mission undertaken by the AU Panel, COMESA, ECCAS, SADC and ICGLR to the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and joint missions with ECOWAS to Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone are all concrete examples of the growing cooperation between the AU Panel and similar mechanism of RECs. It was in that

connection that the Panel of the Wise decided to establish and promote formal linkages with other similar mechanisms at the level of the RECs, and beyond, in order to improve their respective and collective performances and results in peacemaking. It is in line with this idea that the AU convened the first Retreat of the Panel of the Wise with the RECS Elders in Burkina Faso, which took place last year.

Excellencies, Dear Participants

Before going further into the discussions, allow me to summarize the deliberations of the Ouagadougou Retreat, for the benefit of the very few who were not with us. In brief, the Retreat, which had involved the participation of President Blaise Compaore deliberated primarily on conflict prevention and resolution.

The Retreat lauded the efforts being taken by the AU and Regional Mechanisms which all fall under the execution of the African Peace and Security Architecture, but they were in consensus that more needed to be done to address them. Per example, participants called for the Panel of the Wise and its regional counterparts to :

- engage African governments more systematically to on the importance of addressing the underlying causes of conflicts;
- develop a specific *Institutional Development Policy* to strengthen member state institutions both in terms of leadership and structures as well as their relations in order to put countries on a proper course of conflict prevention and development.
- Moreover, the Panel of the Wise and its counterparts were urged to systematically follow-up on their conflict prevention missions, to ensure better results; instead of ending with short engagements.

In that regard, the participants agreed on the need to improve mediation and conflict prevention exercises taking into account the division of labour and principle of subsidiarity between the AU and RECs to avoid duplication of efforts; and working together not only with RECs, but also with a wider group of personalities and senior experts already involved in mediation and conflict prevention at various levels.

Finally, the degree of collaboration between these organizations was greatly emphasized, and prompted participants to agree on the establishment of a continental network of personalities and institutions working in the area of conflict prevention and mediation, which participants decided to name the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise). The meeting also considered a preliminary version of a Framework for the operationalization of PanWise. The Ouagadougou decision was further overwhelming supported at the 7th Meeting of Senior Officials of the AU and RECs/RMs for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution that took place from 9 to 10 December 2012, in Djibouti, which also supported the organization of another retreat that would institutionalize the PanWise by examining the Draft Framework for its Operationalization, as well as an Plan of Action. We need to come out this Retreat with a clear and well-articulated document that would provide for the PANWISE to be made up a bottom up framework and process that would go beyond the AU and RECs and mobilize larger resources within the Associations, such as the African Mediators, but also within local Governments and civil society. The PANWISE should be

an innovative system which should be broad-based, effective and representative of both our Member States and the people of Africa.

Excellencies, Dear Participants,

In view of the foregoing, the Second Retreat is expected to carry the Ouagadougou reflections further: to scan the peace and security horizon, consider joint prevention actions, explore new approaches for our operations, and possibilities of bringing under one structure our individual efforts in the spirit of “**Pan Africanism and African Renaissance**” towards ensuring that the vision of the AU’s founding fathers are realized, a vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

Therefore, the objectives of this Retreat are to:

- i. Examine current challenges to peace and security in Africa and assessing emerging threats to peace and security;
- ii. Reflect on lessons learned and best practice in preventive response to emerging threats at local, regional and continental levels;
- iii. Promote experience-sharing and reflection on recent practical collaboration between the AU Panel of the Wise and Similar Mechanisms at the RECs, and personalities and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level;
- iv. Agree on the modalities for the functioning of the PanWise in line with the conclusions and recommendations of the June 2012 Ouagadougou Retreat for institutionalization within the African Union framework and consideration of and endorsement by the Peace and Security Council; and
- v. Contribute to the definition and Adoption of a PanWise Work Programme/Plan of Action.

Excellencies, Dear Participants.

The consequences emanating from the scourge of conflicts are too obvious and well known to warrant any further elaboration; but we are here to try to devise strategies to move forward our resolve to work together under the PanWise, as part of the realization of the identified continental vision. Therefore, the task in front of us is still enormous, but with your expertise and support I am confident that this Retreat will realize its objectives.

It is my expectation that by the end of this Retreat, we will be able to come out with an enhanced understanding of **conflict prevention / early response/ early action opportunities**, modalities for the functioning of the PanWise as well as a viable work programme or a plan of action to set the ball rolling for the PanWise.

Excellencies, Dear Participants.

Finally, I would like to renew my appreciation to our partners and all those who contributed in one way or another to make this event a success. Certainly, our achievement in realizing the objectives of this Retreat by proper institutionalization of the PanWise should be our great contribution to this year’s Fiftieth Anniversary of the OAU/AU and in upholding high “**Pan Africanism and African renaissance**”.

I wish the deliberations of this Retreat every success. I thank you.