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PRESS RELEASE

Africa Considers Draft Strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons as it Seeks a Common Position on Arms Trade Treaty

26 September 2011, Lomé, Togo: Government Experts from the African Union (AU) Member States are meeting in Lomé, Togo, to consider the draft *AU Strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Related Materials*, and to elaborate an African Common Position on the Arms Trade Treaty. The four-day meeting, which opened on Monday 26 September 2011, is being organized by the African Union Commission (AUC), in collaboration with the Republic of Togo and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC).

Approximately 160 participants, experts from Member States, the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs), the Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons (RECSA), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and Civil Society Organizations attended the opening session of the meeting.

The Chairperson of the Togo National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons (NATCOM), Col. Ali Nadjombé, opened the meeting and thanked the AUC for choosing Togo as the venue. Guest of Honor, Togolese Minister for Public Service and Administrative Reforms, Hon. Solitoki Eso, in his keynote speech, called on participants to ensure that, as an outcome of this meeting, Africa will speak with one voice at next year's UN negotiations on the Arms Trade Treaty, as a testimony of the continent's determination and commitment to curb the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

In his remarks during the opening session of the meeting, Dr. Tarek Sharif, Head of Defense and Security Division of the AUC Peace and Security Department, highlighted the importance of the draft AU Strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Related Materials in contributing towards the full operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). On behalf of the AUC, he thanked the Government and the people of the Republic of Togo for hosting this meeting and for their commitment in the fight against the trafficking and circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

This Strategy is a first step towards establishing a legally binding instrument to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in Africa, and is developed in light of existing regional instruments, such as the SADC Protocol on Firearms, Ammunition, and related materials and the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

