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PRESS RELEASE

THE AFRICAN UNION URGES SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN TO EXPEDITIOUSLY COMPLETE THE ONGOING DISCUSSIONS ON NATIONALITY AND RELATED MATTERS

Addis Ababa, 17 February 2012: The Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), Jean Ping, has been following closely the talks on nationality convened by the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), bringing together the representatives of the Government of Sudan and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. The talks, which were held in Addis Ababa, from 12 to 15 February 2012, were chaired by former President Pierre Buyoya, member of the AUHIP.

The discussions focused particularly on the implementation of the Transition Period agreed to by the Parties and due to expire on 8 April 2012. The Parties sought to adopt joint actions to address the status and treatment of the nationals of each State residing within the territory of the other State.

The discussions also addressed the important concept of the Four Freedoms, which would permit the movement, residence, economic activity and ownership of property within the territories of the two States.

During the meeting, the Panel received reports from each State on the steps it has taken to introduce nationality and related legislation; the documentation of its nationals; the process of repatriation and returns; and the general status of nationals in the other State.

The Chairperson of the Commission notes the progress each State has made to adopt legislation relating to nationality, and appeals to the leadership of both States to adopt processes for the acquisition of nationality and relevant immigration documentation that are efficient and accessible to individuals.

On the question of returns, the two States discussed the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Regarding the Returns of Southern Sudanese** signed in Khartoum, on 12 February 2012. The Chairperson of the Commission commends both Parties for taking important joint decisions aimed at facilitating safe and dignified voluntary returns, and urges them to ensure that the MoU is implemented in full. The Chairperson continues to take a keen interest in the humanitarian situation of South Sudanese who are in transit to South Sudan and looks forward to the successful completion of the repatriation exercise.



The Chairperson of the Commission notes that the two States have made significant progress in the negotiations and welcomes the decision, in principle, to establish a Joint High-level Committee to oversee the implementation of joint measures relating to all matters regarding the status and treatment of nationals of the other State. This Committee will enable the two States to cooperate, at both technical and political levels, on the issues relating to the status of nationals.

The Chairperson strongly supports the recommendation made by the AUHIP that the two States establish the Joint High-Level Committee to immediately address all outstanding issues, giving priority to humanitarian aspects, in particular returns; documentation; the Four Freedoms; and a further review of the Transition Period. The Chairperson looks forward to the early signing of the text on Nationalities and Related Matters prepared by the AUHIP.

The Chairperson of the Commission was distressed to learn of demonstrations by Southern Sudanese citizens residing in Khartoum on 15 February 2012. Such incidents underscore the importance of the two states reaching agreement on all matters pertaining to the status and treatment of their nationals in the other state. It is a matter of critical importance to the lives and well being of thousands of Sudanese and Southern Sudanese citizens.

The Chairperson impresses upon the Parties the need to consider, as paramount, the welfare and rights of all citizens, Sudanese and South Sudanese, residing in either state. He is of the firm view that this concern should be at the core of all negotiations between the two States.