



## PRESS RELEASE

### The African Union saddened by the death of former President Ahmed BEN BELLA and pays tribute to the Founding Father of the OAU and peace builder across the continent

**Addis Ababa, April 12, 2012:** The Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU) Jean Ping, has learned with deep sadness the death in Algiers, yesterday April 11, 2012, of Mr. Ahmed BEN BELLA, the first President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. The African Union fully shares the grief of Algeria.

President BEN BELLA devoted most of his life to fighting for the liberation of his country, for which he made huge sacrifices. He embarked very early in the anti-colonial struggle, which culminated in the independence of Algeria, in July 1962.

In the vision of President Ahmed BEN BELLA, the liberation of Algeria could not be complete so long as the entire continent was not also freed from the yoke of foreign and racial domination. Accordingly, during the Founding Summit of the Organization of the African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, in May 1963, he urged his African peers to "*die a little, or even completely,*" to complete the decolonization agenda and the struggle against Apartheid and racial discrimination. In this context, he was a staunch supporter of African unity, driven as he was by the conviction that without unity, Africa would not be able to meet the challenge of recovering her freedom and dignity.

Former President BEN BELLA's commitment to the Pan-African cause never abated. Thus in 2007, he accepted, at the request of Mr. Alpha Oumar Konare, then Chairperson of the Commission, to head the AU Panel of the Wise, one of the pillars of the African Peace and Security Architecture, which is notably mandated to support conflict prevention efforts on the continent. In his message during the inauguration ceremony of the Panel, in Addis Ababa, on December 18, 2007, former President BEN BELLA, having recalled the founding date of May 25, 1963, and the vivid recollection that came back to his mind, with the scrolling faces of his departed peers, vowed to accomplish the mission which was entrusted to him with "*the highest sense of commitment and with all the integrity that underpins our lifelong commitment to Africa and the peoples of the continent*". With the sense of history and duty that was characteristic of him, he added: "*On behalf of my companions, I would like to declare that we see this mission as a responsibility and an obligation, and we intend to discharge it, with all our energy, in support to the aspirations of all the African peoples to peace, security and stability*".

Consequently, despite his advanced age and declining health, former President BEN BELLA spared neither his efforts nor his energy to fulfill this new responsibility. In this capacity, he participated in several meetings of the Panel, particularly in Addis Ababa, where he returned for the first time in 2008 since the OAU Summit of May 1963. He took the opportunity to visit Africa Hall, where he and other African leaders of the period signed the OAU Charter. He accomplished this "pilgrimage" not only in memory of a major landmark of Pan-Africanism, but also in remembrance of his departed peers.

On the ground, and under the authority of President BEN BELLA, the Panel of the Wise undertook several missions to countries and regions affected by conflicts and tensions, working to facilitate dialogue and to convince all stakeholders to embark, in a firm and durable manner, upon the path of shared peace and security for all the daughters and sons of Africa. Similarly, and as part of its conflict prevention mandate, the Panel launched a number of thematic reflections, particularly on election-related disputes and violence, given the challenges facing the democratization processes on the continent, as well as on the issue of justice and reconciliation, in the context of post-conflict situations and the difficult trade-offs they impose.

With the death of Ahmed BEN BELLA, departs the last Founding Father of the OAU. While Africa, despite the progress made in just over half a century of independence, continues to face multiple challenges, the personality of former President BEN BELLA, his sense of duty and commitment should inspire the current generation in its struggle for a better Africa, where the banner of democracy and freedom must be carried further, higher, as a very natural extension of the struggle for independence and dignity, of which he and the other Founders of the OAU were the great leaders.

On this sad occasion, the Chairperson of the Commission wishes to present the condolences of the AU and his own to the family of the illustrious departed, and to the people and Government of Algeria. He wishes to assure them of the AU's solidarity, and remains convinced that Algeria, which will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its independence in a few weeks time, will continue, in its African engagement, to capitalize on the legacy of the struggle conducted by President BEN BELLA and the noble principles in the service of which he devoted his life.

The members of the Panel of the Wise, the Commissioner for Peace and Security and all the staff of the Peace and Security Department, who had the privilege of working closely with the Grand Departed, as well as all the staff members of the Commission, fully associate themselves with this modest description of the life and work of President Ahmed BEN BELLA and bow before his memory with emotion.