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African Union Mission for Somalia

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

*(For immediate release)*

### ***Lieutenant General Andrew Gutti takes command of AU forces in Somalia***

**Mogadishu - May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012;** Lieutenant General Andrew Gutti, has today taken command of the military component of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) following a handover ceremony presided over by the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia , Ambassador Boubacar Gaoussou Diarra. Ambassador Diarra who was accompanied by the Head of the AU Peace Support Operations Division, Mr. Sivuyile Bam and the AU Focal Point on Somalia, Ambassador Rodney Kiwa commended Lieutenant General Andrew Gutti on his new appointment, saying that his experience and knowledge would be of great benefit to the international effort to restore peace and stability in Somalia.

"Lieutenant General Gutti, will lead AMISOM troops in the ongoing battle to bring peace and prosperity to the Somali people. With the support of the international community, AMISOM will continue to work towards the restoration of peace and freedom of movement for Somalia in the near future, which is critical for the progress in the global fight against terrorism and aspirations for regional stability." He said.

The new AMISOM Force Commander who has served in the Ugandan military for over 26 years will oversee an expanded AMISOM force, which will include Kenyan, Ugandan, Djiboutian, Burundian and Sierra Leonean forces. He takes over from Major General Fred Mugisha during whose tenure, AMISOM forces helped drive the Al Qaeda-affiliated terror group, Al-Shabaab, from fixed positions in Mogadishu, ushering in the longest sustained period of relative peace that the Somali capital has had since the collapse of central government in 1991.

His appointment comes at a time when AMISOM is expanding across the country having secured the capital. In February, the UN Security Council raised AMISOM's authorized strength to 17,731 troops. Once the process of integrating Kenyan and Sierra Leonean units in south Somalia is complete, the force will have a presence in the regions of Bay, Gedo and Lower Juba in addition to Banadir and Middle and Lower Shabelle. Currently 14,400 AMISOM troops are deployed in Somalia with the recent arrival of an advance party of 100 troops in Baidoa to be

soon joined by a further 2,400. Al-Shabaab is becoming marginalized in Southern Somalia as they have lost ground and the support of the Somali population.

Lieutenant General Gutti, commented that the military success of AMISOM has been acknowledged by the current expansion of the mission. He said: "AMISOM's military progress is critical to the future of peace in Somalia. Security and stability will enable a wide cross-section of Somali's to engage in the national political dialogue. We will continue working with the Somali Army and affiliated groups to train its soldiers and advance the National Security and Stabilization Plan, an ongoing process parallel to the approval of a draft constitution."

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