Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 21 January 2020: Under the theme ‘Silencing the guns: creating conducive conditions for Africa's development’, the 33rd African Union (AU) Summit opened on Tuesday 21 January 2020, at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with the conference of the Permanent Representatives’ Committee (PRC) who were meeting at their Thirty Ninth (39th) Ordinary Session.

The opening ceremony took place in the presence of the Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E Amb. Kwesi Quartey, AUC Commissioners, all the Ambassadors of the 55 African Union Member States based in Addis Ababa, representatives from the diplomatic corps, the international community, civil society, media, private sector and invited guests among others.

On behalf of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Deputy Chairperson of the AUC, H.E Amb. Quartey delivered a speech to officially
open the PRC meeting. Amb. Kwesi Quartey underlined the importance of the Institutional Reform of the African Union (AU), in which the Assembly decided to mandate the Chairperson of the Commission to develop a new departmental structure that is lean and performance-oriented, taking into account the division of labour between the African Union, RECs and Regional Mechanisms, Member States and continental organisations. “The Sub-committees of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) reviewed the proposed new structure along with the proposed financing strategy in October and November 2019. The revised proposal was considered and adopted by the PRC from 4-5 December 2019. It will now be considered by Policy Organs in February 2020. The sub-committee provided feedback on the transition plan for the new departmental structure. Based on feedback provided and following validation by the Commission, the sub-committee will review the revised financing and transition plan and then transmit the same for the PRC’s consideration during this session” added Amb. Quartey.

The Deputy Chairperson reaffirmed the Commission’s commitment to work with the PRC, in order to give full measure to the desirable cooperation and synergy between the two institutions. “We need to continue to improve on our budgetary processes and focus on implementation of our vision – Agenda 2063. We seek to use this opportunity to enhance collaboration between the PRC and the Commission.” he said, adding, “We need to appreciate the work of the PRC under the able chairmanship of Ambassador Osama of Egypt. We would like to use this opportunity to encourage the PRC Sub-committees to continue their useful work”.

On financing the Union, Amb. Kwesi Quartey said that a retreat bringing together the Peace and Security Council, the Bureau of the Permanent Representatives Committees, the Board of Trustees and Executive Management Committee of the AU Peace Fund and the Chairs of the Sub-committee on General Supervision and co-ordination of Budgetary, Financial and Administrative Matters and Audit Matters as well as the Committee of Finance Ministers took place on 11 January 2020. The Retreat took stock of the status of operationalization of the AU Peace Fund. The Deputy Chairperson highlighted the commitment of AU Member States to ensure predictable and sustainable financing for peace and security activities in Africa. This is a clear testament to the validity and effectiveness of the Assembly’s Decisions. “While strategic partnerships on peace and security will always be required, the Peace Fund with its $400m endowment from Member States will enable to AU to drive its own peace and security agenda on the basis of its own assessment of the problems and its own determination of the appropriate solution.” added Amb. Kwesi Quartey.

H.E. Amb. Kwesi Quartey also highlighted the work done on new structure for the AUC. He added that this will be extended to all organs to ensure coherence and harmony between the work of the Commission; and other organs to achieve the main phase of the reform and allow the incoming Commission to work in a continuously efficient and effective manner.
In his remarks during the opening ceremony, H.E. Osama Abdel Khalek, Chairperson of the PRC and Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, elaborated on three main domains related to the work of PRC. These are:

- Improving the internal work methods with the Commission;
- Pursuing the main objectives, priorities, and projects of our African Agenda; and
- Partnership Meetings and Engagement with diplomatic and international community.

Amb. Osama Abdel Khalek appreciated the support of PRC members during more than 50 meetings and 200 working hours. “I had the honor to chair on the 20th of February 2019, exactly 11 months ago. The one conclusion I came up with was ‘We have made it all the way to this point only with your support!’ So, first and foremost I want to say thank you” he added.

Amb. Abdel Khalek shed the light on principles guided the work of PRC in addition to the objectives to be achieved at the end of the year. These principles included among others continuous constructive dialogue, predictable and transparent modus operandi, in addition to observing a satisfactory level of discipline and compliance. He noted the improved work with the AU Commission as well as improved cycle of work between departments.

For two days, the 39th Session of the PRC will consider the reports of the various activities of their sub-committees, reports of the AU organs and their activities. Specific activity reports and briefings will be considered during this session such as:

- Report of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC);
- Report of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights (AfCHPR);
- Report of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR);
- Report of the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC);
- Report of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF); and
- Briefing on the Ministerial Follow-up Committee on the Implementation of Agenda 2063.

The PRC will further exchange views on the draft agenda, as well as the draft Decisions and Declarations of the 36th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, and those of the 33rd AU Assembly, before adopting its report.

The 39th Ordinary Session of the PRC will conclude on 22nd January 2020, with the adoption of its report to be submitted to the 36th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council scheduled to hold from 6th – 7th February 2020.

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