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Remarks by the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union,
Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, at the Meeting of the Support and Follow-Up
Group In Bamako, Mali, 19 October 2012

**REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION OF THE AFRICAN
UNION,
DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA, AT THE MEETING OF THE SUPPORT AND
FOLLOW-UP GROUP ON THE SITUATION IN MALI, 19 OCTOBER 2012**

Your Excellency President Dioncounda Traore,

Your Excellency Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra,

Your Excellency Jan Eliasson, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General,

Your Excellency Romano Prodi, United Nations Special Envoy for the Sahel,

Your Excellency Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo, ECOWAS Commission President,

Honorable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you on the occasion of this meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group, here in Bamako. This gathering affords us the opportunity to better coordinate and enhance our efforts in support of our Malian brothers and sisters in these challenging times.

I have chosen to make this first trip, in my official capacity as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to Mali, to convey a message of solidarity from our continent to the people of this great country. In so doing, I also want to highlight the AU's deep concern about the prevailing situation and our determination to do everything in our power to help the people of Mali to find a speedy resolution of the overlapping crises facing their country.

At the African Union, we have been closely following and are actively seized with the developments in Mali. This is our duty, it cannot be otherwise: Mali is one of the founding members of the OAU and the AU, and the principles at stake in the Malian crises are of particular importance to the continent. Africa cannot simply fold its arms while 2/3 of the Malian territory is under the control of armed, terrorist and criminal groups.

The African Union was the first Organization to react to the attacks against Mali by rebel groups in mid-January this year. We did so as a matter of principle because there was and still there is no justification, whatsoever, for the use of arms, particularly when there are peaceful avenues to address legitimate concerns of a given group. We did so because we foresaw the likely consequences that would arise from the resumption of armed conflict in North Mali.

Since January 2012, and working within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture, we have taken a number of steps to contribute, together with ECOWAS, as well as the core countries and our international partners, both bilateral and multilateral, in the search for an early solution. The AU Peace and Security Council has met on several occasions, including at ministerial and Summit level, to deliberate upon the situation in Mali. The Commission has dispatched numerous missions to Bamako to interact with the Malian stakeholders, and we have worked relentlessly to mobilize the support of the international community for an African-led initiative.

The main challenge today is how to deal with the dangerous situation in the North of the country expeditiously. In making reference to this situation, I have in mind the hardships and sufferings faced particularly by women and children and the civilian population in general. I also have in mind the destruction, desecration and damage to sites of holy, historical and cultural significance. I am all the more pained as I had the privilege, in my then capacity as Foreign Minister of the Republic of South Africa, of having been involved in a programme supported by South Africa to conserve ancient manuscripts and the restoration of monuments in Timbuktu, which are part of Mali's contribution to humanity.

Beyond this sad situation, there is the serious threat that the entrenchment of terrorist and criminal networks pose to the stability of Mali, the region and beyond. This is a threat we cannot afford to take lightly, and must hasten to add that the danger it poses extends far beyond the African continent. The sooner we deal with it, the better.

I am however pleased to note the significant progress thus far made towards resolution of the institutional crisis occasioned by the coup d'état of 22 March 2012, while we recognize that challenges still remain. Yet, we are confident that the Malians will indeed find in themselves, the collective wisdom and strength to overcome their challenges. Accordingly, it is critical that all Malians, irrespective of their political affiliations, close ranks during these trying moments in their history. At stake is the very survival of the Malian state. Hence, the need for all Malians to place the interest of the country and its people above any other consideration. In this regard, it is important that women must participate and be fully engaged in contributing to

finding a lasting solution to this conflict. Their voice must be heard in the efforts to promote and sustain democracy in their country. You can certainly count on the support of the African Union and indeed on my personal commitment to this end.

Let me, in this respect, pay tribute to ECOWAS for its pro-active involvement in the quest for a solution. We could not expect less from an Organization that has, over the years, made significant contributions to the promotion of regional peace, security and stability. May I take this opportunity to applaud the tireless efforts of Presidents Alassane Dramane Ouattara, Chair of ECOWAS, as well as H.E Blaise Compaoré and H.E Goodluck Jonathan, Mediator and Associate Mediator, respectively.

I am also aware of the contribution of the core countries, Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger. For years, they have endeavoured, within the framework of the structures they have established, to combat the terrorist and criminal networks in the region.

Let me also express our gratitude to our partners. I am mindful of the critical role of the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular. We welcome the adoption of resolutions 2056 and 2071, in July and in October 2012. I recognize the important role of the EU, whose strategy on the Sahel will go a long way in strengthening the efforts of the countries of the region. I acknowledge the contributions of our other bilateral and multilateral partners.

In Mali and in the Sahel, as in other similar situations, success depends on close coordination of our efforts and the design of strategies that aim

comprehensively to address the challenges at hand. The AU Commission, working with ECOWAS, the UN, the EU, the OIF and other partners, has prepared a draft Strategic Concept articulating in a holistic manner the measures needed to expedite the resolution of the Malian crises. We intend to submit this document to our Peace and Security Council on 24 October 2012, before forwarding it, in light of today's deliberations and outcome, to the UN Security Council.

We must pool our efforts, driven only by the interest of the people of Mali and the priorities they have set. The African Union is fully committed to such an approach. In this respect, we intend to strengthen the AU presence in the Sahel to work more closely with countries of the region and our partners. I intend to shortly appoint a High Representative as well as to establish an office in Bamako that will oversee our Sahel programme. This programme is part of the overall efforts of the international community, within the context of the United Nations, to address the multi-faceted challenges facing the Sahel region, which relate to peace and security, development and environmental degradation.

As I conclude, I would like to commend Interim President Dioncounda Traoré for his determination to lead his country out of its current challenges. I assure him of the AU's full support and commitment to contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for a stable and democratic Malian State responsive to the needs of all its citizens, fully exercising its authority over its national territory and effectively assuming its responsibilities in addressing regional security and other challenges.

I thank you.