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SIXTH MEETING OF THE SUPPORT AND FOLLOW-UP GROUP ON THE SITUATION IN MALI

BAMAKO, 2 NOVEMBER 2013

**OPENING REMARKS BY
H.E DR NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION**

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Your Excellency, Mr Mohamed Ali Bathily, Minister of Justice and Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Mali,

Excellencies members of Government and state institutions,

Mr Kadré Ouedraogo, President of the ECOWAS Commission,

Mr Hervé Ladsous, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations,

Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa,

Mr. Albert Keonders, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Mali,

Mr. Hayia Lawal, representative of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation,

Mr Michel Reveyrand, Special Representative of the European Union,

**Members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of international organisations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On 19 October 2012, barely four days after I officially took over my current position as Chairperson of the AU Commission, my first official visit was here to Bamako. I participated in the 2nd meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group on the situation in Mali.

Today, exactly a year later, I am here again in Bamako, participating in the 6th meeting of the same Group. Between these two meetings, many things have happened. Many things indeed!

This time last year, almost all the northern regions of Mali were under the occupation of various armed and terrorist groups. State authority was non-existent in these regions. The suffering of fleeing displaced people and refugees, especially women, children and the elderly, was palpable. Mali's territorial integrity and national unity was called into question.

A transitional Government was in place, but was faced with challenges regarding the smooth and coherent implementation of the transitional Roadmap. In fact, that Roadmap was some three months away from its final adoption. The international community was still discussing about the best strategy of intervention.

Today, a year later, the picture has dramatically changed.

What a change: an end has been put to the occupation of the northern regions and normalcy is returning gradually; a peace agreement has been signed to pave the way for more inclusive talks; presidential elections have been successfully organised and a President invested with a big margin of legitimacy is in power. I have had the opportunity to congratulate President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita on the popular bestowed in him. We are now talking about organising legislative elections in a few weeks' time.

A year ago, we were almost helpless vis-à-vis the economic situation and the destruction of property; today, we are talking about development and the Renaissance of Mali. One could go on with the analogies. In short, things have changed and for the better.

But this change did not happen out of the blue. It was the result of concerted efforts by various stakeholders, within Mali, in ECOWAS and in the larger international community. For us, at the African Union, we are resolute in our commitment to stand with the Government and people of Mali in this trying but promising moment of their history.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

In this year which marks the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU, under the theme Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance, we must celebrate the contributions of Mali and its people. When we recall the ancient African civilizations, the Kingdom of Mali stands out with its contribution to governance, trade, metallurgy and mining, arts and culture, education, knowledge and the role of women.

As a founding member of the OAU, Mali played a vital role in the quest for continental unity and the completion of the decolonisation process. In reconstructing a post-independent state, it recognised the importance of managing the diversity of its peoples, with their assorted cultures, languages and religions, and the importance of peaceful co-existence and cooperation.

**Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As Mali therefore emerges from its recent difficulties, it must draw from these proud traditions and history, to foster peace, reconciliation and inclusion, in order to build a national compact for the reconstruction and development of the country.

As we look at the best ways and means of supporting Mali in the period ahead, we should seize the opportunity of this meeting to restate our unflinching commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali. State authority has to be restored over the entire Northern part of the country. There can be no exception to this rule.

Our meeting should therefore insist that the armed groups in Kidal unconditionally and immediately vacate public buildings. We should, in no uncertain terms, insist that they embrace, and commit to, the peace and reconciliation process. In short, we have to say that enough is enough, for Mali and its people cannot continue to be held hostage to narrow considerations and interests.

We, therefore, encourage the Government and the armed groups in the North to continue the implementation of the 18 June 2013 Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement in good faith. In this regard, we must also emphasize that lasting peace and reconstruction will not be possible without the participation of the Malian women, who constitute over half of the Malian population.

I praise President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita for the passion he has shown and for the courageous steps taken to promote confidence building in the context of the Ouagadougou Agreement. These are signs of true leadership. I assure him of the AU support and solidarity.

The Malian State is located in a region (Sahel and West Africa) that influences what happens in Mali and vice versa. This makes regional coordination a “must”. We all know that durable solutions to certain challenges faced by Mali, like terrorism and other forms of transnational crimes, integration and shared prosperity, can only be found through regional cooperation and coordination.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Following the transfer of authority from the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) to a United Nations Operation (MINUSMA), on 1 July 2013, the AU Commission deemed it necessary to reaffirm its commitment to Mali and the rest of the Sahel region. It is against this background that the AU established the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), with its headquarters here in Bamako.

The focus of MISAHEL is on promoting inclusive and effective governance, mainstreaming of gender equality and regional security and cooperation. I am very pleased that former President Pierre Buyoya, our High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, has accepted to remain in Bamako as Head of MISAHEL. We are now working towards the full operationalization of MISAHEL, so that we can more effectively contribute to the efforts aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the region. Already, I am encouraged to note that the Nouakchott Process, initiated by the AU Commission in March this year, is proving particularly useful in deepening security cooperation amongst the Sahelo-Saharan countries and in operationalizing the African

Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) in the region.

As we meet here today, we are reminded of a very welcome show of international solidarity. Let me, however, close my remarks by underscoring the importance of cooperation and consultation among the various international actors if we want our support to be effective, and avoid unhealthy competition and duplication.

**Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Our efforts should aim at empowering the Malian state and its population, especially women and youth, to enable them to own and lead the Malian Renaissance.

I have no doubt that Mali, with its rich history and culture, its generous and proud people and its long-standing commitment to Pan-Africanism, will regain its rightful place in the community of African nations.

We need Mali, like we need every single African country, to be peaceful and stable, so that Africa can unite and invest in its people. As we mourn the deaths of African migrants who perished in Niger and countless other similar deaths, we must scale up our investment in Africa's young men and women, so that they do not have to face such perilous journeys, leaving their countries in pursuit of an illusive mirage. There can be no African Renaissance, without the Malian Renaissance.

I thank you