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**STATEMENT BY Dr. JEAN PING,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING ON SOMALIA,
28 JANUARY 2012**

Your Excellences, Ministers of Foreign Affairs;

Our Special Guest, the Rt. Hon. Andrew Mitchell, the UK Development Secretary;

Your Excellency, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Ambassador Augustine Mahiga;

Your Excellency, the AU High Representative for Somalia, President JJ Rawlings;

Distinguished delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you all for your very positive response to my invitation, to this meeting on Somalia. As indicated in my invitation, this meeting is holding as part of on-going preparations for the London Conference scheduled for 23 February 2012, thanks to the initiative of Prime Minister David Cameron.

Excellences, you will recall that at its 306th meeting held on 5 January 2012, the Peace and Security Council welcomed the British Prime Minister's initiative and

stressed that it was looking forward to its constructive impetus on the international community's support to the political, security, humanitarian and developmental efforts in Somalia.

Officials have since met in Abu Dhabi on January 11 and a core group of experts met in London on January 13 to prepare for the Conference. In this regard I am happy to welcome Rt. Hon. Andrew Mitchell, the British International Development Secretary, who will update us on preparations for the Conference on Somalia and indeed his thoughts on the expected outcomes. Of course this meeting will inform the hosts and other participants on the direction and pace you wish the peace process in Somalia should take.

One cannot overemphasize the importance of the London Conference on Somalia, coming as it will, six months before the end of the transition period. It should be a game changer. The Conference should set the bar on what to expect of the Somali political leadership and people, who must always be at the center of all our endeavors, and define our commitments in support of the peace process. More importantly, the Conference needs to come out with the political and multifaceted material support which would be commensurate with the requirements of our shared ambitious goals in Somalia. Indeed, it is our collective responsibility to live up to the challenges.

Excellences, the challenges we face in Somalia are many and complex, and all too familiar. They are about the political process, security issues, AMISOM operations, local stability and international coordination. The challenge is to find a working formula to deliver Somalia from the ills of the past and win the future.

Excellences, we have to acknowledge and appreciate progress on the ground so far made. The joint TFG and AMISOM operations resulted in the defeat of Al Shabaab in Mogadishu, and as recent as 21 January, they were defeated yet again in the first contact outside of Mogadishu. Please join me in congratulating our gallant fighters, both AMISOM and TFG.

On the political front, progress has also been made in the implementation of the Kampala Accord, in particular its Political Roadmap to end the transition. The adoption of the Garowe Principles by the Somali National Consultative Conference in December 2011 was a landmark development, in spite of the current difficulties. I am here referring to the hiatus between the Speaker of Parliament and the contending one and the emergence of spoilers. They must not be allowed to fester the political process.

I remain, you might say, an incurable optimist with regard to Somalia. An attitude anchored in the firm belief that inaction in Somalia is not an option. At this critical stage, Somalia requires political, financial, military and diplomatic heavy lifting. We will need, as before, to approach the issue of Somalia from many perspectives and combine the various approaches to find innovative and bold solutions.

This is the challenge for the London Conference. It must seek coherence and meaning in the peace process through integrative and critical thinking combined with appropriate problem framing.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.