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CONTINENTAL EXPERTS MEETING
CAPE TOWN
SOUTH AFRICA
1-5 August 2016

**EPIDEMIOLOGICAL NETWORK PLANNING MEETING AND CONTINENTAL
CONSULTATION FOR DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION FOCAL POINTS**

Opening Remarks
Amb. Olawale I. Maiyegun (PhD)
Director of Social Affairs

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors present here,
Esteemed Member State Representatives,
Regional Economic Community Representatives
Distinguished Stakeholder Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure once again to extend a cheerful welcome to you all to this technical consultation on drug demand reduction and establishment of epidemiological networks in Africa. Your presence here today demonstrates the commitment and concern we share on the drug problem. As I look around the room, am in awe with the collective expertise gathered here. From the AU member states, we have an all-time high of 36 countries represented, which together with our international partners, make an excellent mix.

The consultation comes halfway into implementation of the decisions of the First Specialized Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control (STC-HPDC-1) that took place in April 2015. At the Session, Member States recommit to scaling up advocacy for balanced and integrated responses towards drug control that involves appropriate linkages between drugs, health and crime while confronting political and governance weaknesses, as well as promoting availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific use, including in emergency and conflict situations, while preventing their diversion.

Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the cornerstones of this commitment no doubt, is provision of evidence- based treatment services, which to a large extent is also predicated on sufficient and reliable information on drug use patterns and trends, hence our efforts to strengthen research and data collection capacity for drug use. AUC, with the financial support of the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is implementing a project "*Strengthening Research and Data Collection Capacity for Drug Use Prevention and Treatment in Africa*", under whose auspices this consultation is organized.

The focus of the consultation is to review where we are at with improving access to comprehensive, evidence-informed, ethical and human rights based drug use prevention, dependence, treatment and aftercare services; as well as to plan for the development of

systematic, structured and sustainable drug use epidemiology systems. The AUC takes great pride in that we will not be starting from scratch, but there are time tested networks such as Southern Africa Epidemiological Network on Drug Use (SENDU); and nascent ones like the West African Epidemiological Network on Drug Use (WENDU) and four countries, namely, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Senegal from which much learning and good practices will be derived.

As you are aware, the first two days of the meeting has already delved into modalities for the establishment of national epidemiology networks, whose outcome will be presented to you shortly for discussion and consideration. It is our sincere hope that at the end of this meeting, we will have consensus on future directions, including selection of initial countries that will benefit from capacity building training initiatives.

Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen

We will also take the opportunity of this meeting to prepare for the next Specialized Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control (STC-HPDC), scheduled to take place in March 2016. While reviewing STC reporting requirements such as on implementation of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017), I want to challenge us to think long term, in particular, post UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS 2016); and how we implement both what we committed to in the Common African Position (CAP) for the UNGASS, and major UNGASS outcomes with regards to drug treatment and prevention issues which incredibly resonate with AUC policy directions as espoused in:

1. AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017)
2. The Addis Ababa Declaration on Scaling up Balanced and Integrated Responses towards Drug Control in Africa adopted at the Sixth Session of the African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Drug Control (CAMDC6), October 2014
3. The Common African Position for the UNGASS.

In this regard, Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen, we look forward to some well-considered and precise issues that you would want to bring to the attention of your Ministers during the upcoming STC in March next year that can facilitate your work in making all the referenced commitments a reality on the ground. We don't need reminding that the drug problem continues to present challenges to health, safety and wellbeing in our countries that must be met

with an equal force of high level political commitment. We equally emphasize that it remains a common and shared responsibility requiring increased international cooperation.

In conclusion, I wish to express my personal gratitude for the collaborative venture witnessed in the organization of this consultation. Special appreciation to International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) for continued collaboration and Government of the Republic of South Africa which has provided excellent political and administrative backstopping. We also acknowledge the immense technical contribution of SENDU, WENDU, UNODC and WHO. These are true alliances, based on common goals and interests and the African Union Commission values your commitment.

I thank you.