Opening Remarks by Mr Jalel Chelba, Head of Civil Society Division, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate on Behalf of His Excellency the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Mr. Moussa Faki Mohamat

Presented to the third Intercontinental CSO Forum, Tunis, Tunisia, 11-13 July 2017
Your Excellency Mr Eyed Dahmani, representing the Tunisian government

Your Excellences, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Representatives of the African Union and European Commission,

Participants and Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society from Africa and Europe,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocols observed

It’s with great pleasure to welcome you all to the AU-EU Intercontinental CSO Forum, a gathering of African and European Civil Society Organizations within the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) supported by the African Union and the European Union commissions.

It is my honor to address this Forum on behalf of His Excellency, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. I wish to stress that His Excellency attaches the greatest significance to the effective participation of civil society in the policy process and considers this deliberation as a critical and vital element of the AU-EU partnership. The objective of this intercontinental dialogue is to create a credible platform to deliberate on issues pertaining to civil society intervention that will sustain a people centred partnership to accelerate and support sustainable development and global partnership process, as well as produce concrete activities and recommendations that will be delivered to governments ahead of the 5th AU –EU Summit.

I would like to share the sentiment of the Chairperson of the AUC in his speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in May this year, and I quote “the International Horizon is now marked by alarmingly rapid change and that we must strengthen our strategic partnership, and work together as equals, side by side to find practical solution to these challenges”; end of quote. Indeed our world is confronted with numerous social challenges which requires our concerted effort to enable us overcome the seeming insurmountable challenges. A lot of effort has been put into addressing these challenges such as the post 2015 development agenda which calls on all major players to significantly contribute to its full implementation and uniquely overcome global challenges and achieve sustainable development. From African perspective, this is an important agenda which we are committed and geared for its full implementation.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

The Africa Union has developed its own continental blueprint, agenda 2063, which is a continental roadmap that reflects the socioeconomic realities of our continent and the deliberate actions in addressing these issues. In the world of globalization, these
challenges cannot be addressed unilaterally. We need the total support of all major players in the spirit of an equal partnership to be able to work together to address such challenges. It is imperative to note that the constitutive act of the African Union Commission places neither significant emphasis on all partnerships of which the AU-EU is nor exception. To demonstrate this commitment, the AU through the Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (CIDO) has been facilitating this process over the years to ensure that CSO's have the congenial space to take ownership and play a pivotal role in the process. This commitment from the AU is manifested through the technical and financial support to this forum and we would like to assure you all of our continuous support in this direction.

Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society in Africa and Europe,

The Africa-EU Partnership process began about 10 years ago in the context of shared values and aspirations along with a determination to transform our common history, of a shared colonial heritage, into a platform for productive dialogue and a support mechanism for Africa’s development. Expectations were high and there was an atmosphere of common optimism. More significantly, there was a shared perspective that the structural transformation that the partnership was designed to put in place would be people-centered and people-driven, rather than just a government-to-government agenda.

In this regards, the partnership recognized the importance of state parties but also emphasized the correlative importance of civil society and the need to create and sustain civil society space as a necessary condition for success. It is imperative to note that civil society was assigned duties and responsibilities along with other stakeholders in defining the agenda as well as program of implementation and offered independent and coordinate spaces for interaction in this process. Civil society was also given an autonomous sphere for ensuring the effectiveness of its own participation in the process and you will need to examine how this was used critically.

Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society,

The overall demand on your gathering here is to contribute significantly to the various thematic discussion and come up with a common position that geared towards addressing the fundamental challenges affecting the citizens of both continent. This should be done in the best interest of the greater community of all stakeholders widely defined as the people of the continents of Africa and Europe. The array of expertise and skills gathered here gives us confidence that you will do this in a constructive and most appropriate fashion.

As I conclude, it would be inappropriate if I fail to recognize the remarkable achievement of the work of the civil society organizations in Tunisia with particular reference to the Tunisian National Quartet’s work which accorded them the Nobel peace prize for their
work on transitional democracy during one of the most challenging period in the history of this country. This is indeed an inspiring achievement and a model that is worth emulating by all. This further demonstrate the significant role of CSO’s that goes beyond their traditional work. The quartet decision to engage all the parties demonstrated the need for inclusion rather than exclusion.

The African Union Commission looks forward eagerly to receiving the reports of your deliberations and promises to support recommendations, proposals, measures and strategies that will strengthen the renewed AU-EU partnership in a manner that will enable and accelerate the pace of delivery on its promises to the African people.

On this note, I thank you all for gathering here to promote and sustain the common cause of the people of Africa and Europe and wish you all success in your deliberations and recommendations as we work to strengthen the Africa-EU partnership in preparation for the 5th Africa-EU Summit in November 2018 in Abidjan.

I thank you all.