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SECOND ANNUAL U.S.-AU COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM WEEK

AU STATEMENT PRESENTED

BY

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Esteemed representatives of AU Member States

Distinguished delegation of the Nited States Government

Representative of the Institute for Security Studies

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by warmly welcoming you all to this **Second Annual U.S.-AU Countering Violent Extremism Week**, which is being hosted by the African Union Commission, here Addis Ababa

I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government of the United States of America, which has remained a strong partner of the AU in the area of peace and security, good governance and human rights. The AU-US partnership in countering terrorism and violent extremism has particularly grown stronger over the years as the two parties increasingly collaborate in means to address the multifaceted threats and strive towards implementing sustainable approaches.

This is yet another forum for the AU Commission and the US Government to discuss concrete steps in developing community-oriented approaches to counter hateful extremist ideologies that radicalize, recruit or incite to violence in the continent.

The complexity of violent extremism and terrorist crimes on the continent defies generalizations and one-size-fits-all policy responses. The AU's approach have thus evolved in response to such complexities.

As early as the year 1992, the AU took steps to address state-sponsored terrorism through the adoption of resolutions and declarations on a code of conduct for inter-African relations and on strengthening cooperation among states. In the late 1990's, the continent recognized the need for a robust multi-dimensional approach and thus adopted the 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism which provides, among other things, measures to counter terrorist financing, strengthen the criminal justice response to terrorism, and fosters inter-state police and judicial cooperation. In 2004, the Convention was supplemented by a Protocol which addresses the convergence of terrorism and organized crime, which manifested at the time most notably in piracy and the kidnap-for-ransom phenomena.

Over the past years there has been a positive shift in the global response to terrorism that aims to prevent violence and address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. There are inherent difficulties in this approach, but this should not mean that we must abandon it all together. Please allow me to mention a few of these difficulties based on our experience in Africa.

The first difficulty lies in the fact that political violence remains a key impediment to socio-economic development in Africa, and both are at play in a vicious cycle. From the LRA in Central Africa, to ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram in the Sahel, to Al-Shabaab in East Africa, extremist groups have exploited conditions of under-development and the breakdown of law and order to acquire resources, recruit and operate.

The second difficulty is the absence of concrete and sustainable post-conflict reconstruction and development that is required to address the interlinked causes of political violence and under-development, and prevent relapse into conflict. Global resources for such interventions are increasingly dwindling as traditional donors change their foreign aid priorities.

The African Union has therefore launched the African Solidarity Initiative to support states emerging from conflict and organized several donor conferences to mobilize resources aimed at overcoming structural deficits in the areas of governance and development in several African states.

The third difficulty is understanding what motivates young men and women to join the ranks of violent extremist groups. The dominant and stereotypical explanation was that these are unemployed and marginalized individuals that have succumbed to the appeal of charismatic fanatical leaders who promised them a better afterlife. But research conducted on the continent indicates that this is not always the case. In fact there is often a combination of factors some of which are neither religious nor ideological. This is not to say that ideology and religion do not play an important role in many instances. Nonetheless, there is a need for policy responses that are specifically designed to address the local realities and the multiplicity of factors, whether economic, ethnic, political, or religious.

The fourth difficulty, which concerns the international community as a whole, are the factors that lie beyond the immediate local context. From the conflict in the Middle East to the rise of Islamophobia and right wing groups in the west, these issues are craftily integrated into the narrative of violent extremist groups to portray a global injustice and instill fear and hatred. We should therefore be mindful of the fact that conditions that provide a fertile ground for violent extremism have to be addressed both locally and globally.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The African Union is nevertheless confident that this preventive approach can yield mutually reinforcing benefits for peace and development. I wish to highlight only a few points on how to make such an approach effective and sustainable at different levels.

At the national level, there is a critical need for a whole-of-government approach. This cannot be ad-hoc nor transplanted but instead needs to be developed from the bottom-up and continuously reviewed and adapted in consultation with all the relevant national institutions and civil society segments.

At the regional level, we must heed to early warnings. This requires an investment in pre-emptive interventions that focus on developmental action, preventive diplomacy and community outreach. In the past few years, the AU has invested substantially in operationalizing the Continental Early Warning System, which is also developing indicators for terrorism early warning. The AU Peace and Security Council is now receiving regular reports on the basis of which concrete action is being agreed upon and launched.

At the international level, all states must continuously seek to work together through approaches that do not cause harm, but which reflect the principles that bind together our international community, and with a sense of duty and responsibility for the immediate and long-term welfare of all societies across the globe. Therefore, I strongly urge members of the international community to continue to invest in conflict prevention, peace-building and international development.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust that today's conference will allow us to further deliberate openly and constructively in exploring approaches to respond to one of this age most pressing security concerns. The role of civil society cannot be over emphasized. They remain at the forefront has have taken a lead role in responding to the terrorism threat. This platform provides an ideal opportunity to share, document and build on the experiences of civil society organizations as key stakeholders in peace and security in Africa.

Thank you for your kind attention.