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African Union -NATO Symposium on peace and security

Naples, 4 November 2019

Remarks of His Excellency Ambassador Smail Chergui

African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security

Admiral Foogo, Head of the NATO South-Hub and Allied Joint Forces Command,
Ambassador Morten Aasland,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Allied Joint Forces Command for hosting this symposium. This gathering gives us the opportunity to focus on our concerns and opportunities and indeed our partnership priorities. The African Union and NATO have enjoyed a collaborative relationship even before the signing of an agreement that led to an institutionalized engagement. Both organizations are indeed convinced of the importance of more close interaction on matters of peace support operations and capacity building. It must be noted that NATO consistently provides our military and civilian staff with training opportunities that enhance the institution's capacity to deliver on its mandate at a technical level. Furthermore, operational support in logistical coordination and planning is an area in which NATO readily assists the African Union when needed.

Excellencies,

While we celebrate each stride in the right direction, we must still come to terms with common challenges in the security arena and the gaps in our security cooperation. As with other partners, the AU-NATO collaboration is important in addressing the growing security challenges on the continent. Allow me to highlight a few of the pressing and growing concerns we face within and across our borders on the continent:

First, let me underscore that radicalization remains one of the major threats to peace and security on the continent. Extremist groups have perfected the art of recruitment, facilitated by the use of cyber platforms and structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, ethnic and religious fissures and competing political ideologies. Extremist groups like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram and other criminal groups use social media and online recruitment platforms to spread radical propaganda to the general public in various languages.

The sophistication of terrorist organizations does not stop at their radicalization and recruitment strategies. Over the years, these groups have morphed into well-organized shadow-governments, providing services and in some cases acting as the judge, jury and executioner. They have diversified their sources of funding and in some of the groups' levies taxes, collects revenue from checkpoints and trades with the local population to raise funds. Some entities, such as the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) are involved in the illegal selling of gold and other minerals, and are determined to have access to the Sea in order to secure trade routes.

The terrorists groups are also fueling inter-communal violence. In Mali, terrorists are exploiting the tensions between the ethnic Fulani against the Daousshaq. In Central Gourma (the area between Burkina Faso and Mali), the terrorist group Katiba Macina provides military training and equipment to pastoralists in their conflict with the farmers.

Unfortunately, the tools employed by terrorist groups are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Their bomb-making skills have significantly improved and "Drone terrorism" is

now a reality we must grapple with. The sophistication of the terrorist organizations is a clear indication that our security-centered approach is insufficient. A recent study has indicated that our security efforts have been focused too much on protecting the state and less on protecting populations- pushing them into the arms of local militias or even terrorist organizations. Combatting the scourge of extremism demands a holistic approach that encompasses a strong political component and that takes into account the evolving global dynamics in support of our security efforts.

Secondly, there is a need to emphasize that the African continent is likely to remain vulnerable to transnational crimes including drugs, arms, as well as human trafficking as demonstrated by the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. We are also likely to experience cyber threats and bioterrorism. The worrying trend is that criminals are constantly adapting to an increasingly bipolar (I would say multipolar) world.

We see a new trend whereby Africans are selling their services as mercenaries in different conflicts on the continent or outside the continent. African mercenaries are expanding beyond war and into organized crime. The lack of laws governing these forces, which often operate outside of the control of the state, for private companies or non- African states, makes it an even bigger challenge. However, it also provides an opportunity for states to enhance and concretize collaboration. This is an issue that requires us to strengthen cooperation among CISSA member states at various levels, in order to understand this new phenomenon but also to disarm and demobilize mercenaries. As part of our prevention efforts, we also need to develop strategies to engage our youth and protect those who could fall prey to these groups and thus deprive us of the Africa we want.

Excellencies,

More can be said, particularly with regards to health pandemics such as Ebola, climate change and natural disasters, as well as food insecurity. Climate change continues to be one of the most pervasive global threats to peace, affecting security, development and peacebuilding. The effects of climate change in Africa are further exacerbating existing geopolitical tensions within the continent and affecting development strategies.

This year alone, Africa has experienced a series of extreme weather events linked to climate change, with cyclones and intense rainfall triggering massive displacement and loss of livelihoods as well as drought and desertification pushing hundreds of thousands towards extreme hunger, poverty and livelihood insecurity across Africa.

Occurring against a backdrop of ongoing and worsening political conflict and humanitarian crises across the regions, climate change is affecting the security of vulnerable communities, especially in conflict-affected contexts. For many already fragile communities, the impact is reflected in political instability, food insecurity, economic weakness and large-scale movement of people.

In an unstable environment where communities have lost their livelihoods due to the impact of a changing climate, insurgent groups can capitalize on the absence of an adequate government response by providing basic services to ungoverned spaces which then become fertile recruiting grounds.

As such, during the PSC's 828th meeting in February 2019, the Council considered the inextricable linkages between climate change and peace and security. Acknowledging that

climate change is an existential multidimensional and multilayered threat to local, national, regional and continental peace, security and stability, the Council emphasized the need for collective and holistic approaches towards building resilience and mitigating against its adverse effects.

Last but not least, maritime security remains at the heart of our priorities. Piracy, dumping of toxic waste, illegal fishing and other maritime crimes continue to pose a challenge to our collective security, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. Allow me to take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation to the efforts of the EU NAVFOR, which helped to curb piracy off the coast of Somalia. Looking ahead, we will work with our partners to curtail illegal activities in the Gulf of Guinea as part of the implementation of the Lome Charter on Maritime Security and Safety.

Excellencies,

As we look toward the challenges ahead, we should aim to redouble our cooperative efforts at the technical and political levels. There is no shortage of areas in which the African Union Commission and NATO can come together to strengthen joint efforts to address these key peace and security challenges on the continent.

As we know, silencing the Guns is a goal that we must remain devoted into and beyond 2020. Furthermore, the AU Commission and its Member States are committed to realizing the African Continental Free Trade Area, the African Passport, the Free Movement of Peoples, and the Single African Air Transport Market to further solidify African unity and prosperity. We insist that our preparedness for issues of transnational crime, public health and security are paramount to ensuring the sustainability and success of these initiatives to best benefit the African people and their economies.

Additionally, issues of gender, women, and children's rights in peace and security should be increasingly prioritized in a joint attempt to implement UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1261. As always, we rely on the willingness of our partners to continue this journey with us while upholding the principles of mutual respect, complimentary and avoiding competition.

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with you on important issues, to realign our common goals, and to reinforce the belief of our Member States in the collaboration with NATO. Integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa is in the making, let our cooperation be an added value to this noble goal.

I thank you for your kind attention