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The 8th Annual Humanitarian Symposium

11 November 2020, 15:00hrs-18:00hrs

Opening Remarks

**By H.E Cessouma Minata Samate
Commissioner for Political Affairs, AUC**

**Theme : Humanitarian Action within the context of COVID-19 and AU Theme of the Year 2020
Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development**

**Excellencies,
Representatives from Embassies in Addis Ababa,
Representatives from the Regional Economic Communities,
Officials representing various AU partners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is my singular honor and pleasure to officially open the **8th Annual African Union Humanitarian Symposium** that the African Union Commission (AUC) is organizing during this unprecedented period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let me start by thanking you all for taking time to attend and participate in this symposium. I would like to pay special thanks to **Ambassador Rebecca Amuge Otenge**, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uganda to Ethiopia and the AU and Chairperson of the African Union (AU) PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), who has also joined us today.

COVID-19 has prevented all of us with unprecedented and multi-dimensional challenges. This is indeed why we have chosen to discuss it and its impact on humanitarian response in Africa during our annual Symposium. Our meeting today will be the beginning of a three days critical conversation on key thematic topics selected based on extensive consultations.

The 2020 AU Annual Symposium is framed around three key thematic areas. These include:

- Supporting inclusive Humanitarian Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa,
- Addressing humanitarian challenges in the context of the 2020 AU theme on “Silencing of Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s development
- Building the Momentum on the Achievements of 2019 AU Theme of Year on *Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons* by promoting durable solutions.

I am encouraged by the level of interest from our Member States and humanitarian partners on this symposium. I would like to thank all of you for supporting our efforts. I am also delighted to see that representatives of refugees and displaced persons will be meaningfully participating in this event with the support of our partner, UNHCR.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Africa sadly hosts a third of global 79.9 million forcibly displaced persons. This include 19.2 million IDPs, 7.8 million refugees and asylum seekers and 172,000 stateless persons. Moreover, there are many civilians who are trapped in protracted conflict situations in several regions not to mentions those individuals who find themselves in countries that are suffering from natural disasters, flooding, locust infestation to mention few.

You will recall the clarion call by the UN Secretary General as well as by the AU Chairperson for ceasefire. Conflicts are raging unabated in the Sahel, Lake Chad region, and Cabo Delgado region in Mozambique. I therefore wish to congratulate Libya that has taken concrete steps towards ceasefire and silencing the guns and call on other belligerents to emulate this example.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and challenges faced by particularly vulnerable populations including refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless person. Displaced populations often face distinct and specific protection challenges and are somehow now vastly affected by health pandemics such as Covid-19 amongst others.

Too often displaced populations are found in protracted displacement situations living with and amongst the poor host communities for an extended period. The protracted nature of their displacement further compounds their vulnerability and that of their hosts. As both refugee influx and internal displacement situations remain protracted, their negative consequences for development have become evident and increasingly recognized.

The COVID-19 pandemic is presently ravaging African economies and stretching the health systems beyond their limits with enormous social, economic, political and humanitarian implications. Protection of vulnerable populations including children, women, IDPs, refugees and stateless persons, the elderly and people living with disabilities in conflict zones during the Covid-19 pandemic remains imperative.

There is so much we can collectively undertake. We can support actions aimed at insuring that health facilities are open to all and that they have the capacity and the means to provide services. We must also acknowledge the fact that COVID-19 is no longer a health crisis. As such we need to promote solidarity, unity and hope' in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic by expanding livelihood, economic and other related services.

The African Union and its partners such as the United Nations have expressed concern over "lack of global solidarity", within developing countries that need support in responding to the worst economic and social crisis triggered by the impact of Covid-19 pandemics.

Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests,

The COVID-19 pandemic has created immense challenges and risks to economies and the development prospects as well as aspirations of African countries. As we all know the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 have resulted in significant impacts on refugees and displaced persons in the form of border closures, travel restrictions, and discrimination. It is important therefore that our collective response is grounded on the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, vulnerable migrants and stateless persons.

The African Union supports inclusive national efforts through policy guidance, global advocacy and capacity building. Ratification and implementation of key regional treaties including the Kampala convention still remains vital and we must commend countries such as Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Somalia, and South Sudan that have ratified the Convention since the launch of AU theme of the year 2019 and joining other countries that have ratified this convention. The African Union Commission will continue lobbying with other member states to continue ensuring their buy-in, support, ratification and implementation of this convention.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

The African Union Commission has been working with its Member States, RECs and partners to ensure that Member States take practical steps to include refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, vulnerable migrants and stateless persons in their national responses to COVID-19. The AUC will continue to call for an Inclusive and a “Whole of Society Approach – Leaving no one behind” in national efforts across the continent to successfully combat COVID-19 in Africa and in ensuring the protection of human rights to all refugees, IDPs, asylum-seekers and migrants and increased access to Health care facilities, socio-economic interventions and other key humanitarian interventions.

It is vital that these national efforts are supported through concrete international support and collaboration. We will therefore require support of the international community to combat the virus for all who live within their territories noting that Refugees and internally displaced people are at greater risk.

I, again, salute you all for taking time to join the African Union Commission in renewing our collective commitments in ensuring protection and assistance as well as seeking durable solutions for Refugees, IDPs and Returnees in Africa in this challenging times.

I look forward to fully engaging in these deliberations.

Thank you