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PRESS RELEASE

AFRICAN UNION CELEBRATES ITS FIRST "AFRICAN BORDER DAY" WITH THE AIM OF TRANSFORMING AFRICAN BORDERS FROM BARRIERS TO BRIDGES

Addis Ababa, 7 June 2011 – Today, the African Union (AU) celebrated the first African Border Day at the AU Headquarters, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the theme: **“Uniting and integrating Africa through peaceful, open and prosperous borders”**.

On behalf of the Commission and its Chairperson, Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security, presided over the celebration, in the presence of African and non-African Ambassadors, representatives of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and partner institutions, as well as civil society organizations.

It is to be recalled that the institution of 7 June as the African Border Day was recommended by the second meeting of the African Ministers in charge of Border Issues, held in Addis Ababa, on 25 March 2010, as a way of further popularizing the AU Border Programme (AUBP) and mobilizing the requisite support for the efforts to promote peaceful and prosperous borders in Africa. That recommendation was endorsed by the AU Executive Council at its 15th Ordinary Session held in Kampala, Uganda, in July 2010.

June 7th also marks the day on which the African Ministers in charge of Border Issues held a meeting in 2007 in Addis Ababa that established the AUBP with the following components: border delimitation/demarcation, cross-border cooperation, capacity building and resource mobilization. The overall objective of the AUBP is to contribute to the structural prevention of conflicts and to deepen economic integration on the continent.

Today’s celebration provided an opportunity to sensitize AU Member States, African border populations, RECs and other stakeholders on the importance of promoting peace and integration on the African continent through delimitation and demarcation of borders where such an exercise has not yet taken place, as well as through cross-border cooperation.

In his opening remarks, Commissioner Lamamra stressed the commitment of the African countries to transform their borders from barriers into bridges, as a way of addressing the legacy of conflict arising from the inherited colonial boundaries. *“African leaders were convinced that by transcending the borders as barriers and promoting them as bridges linking one State to another, Africa can boost the ongoing efforts to integrate the continent, strengthen its unity and promote peace, security and stability through the structural prevention of conflicts”*, said Ambassador Lamamra. He further stated that the decision to prioritize the delimitation and demarcation of the inherited borders was not predicated on a desire to confine each country within its own designated territory: *“On the contrary, it means that border delimitation and demarcation is a condition for successful integration. A non-defined border is susceptible to being a source of contention, and even conflict. Border delimitation and demarcation, in a way, removes its potential nuisance; it opens the door rather than closes it; it allows for a healthy process of cooperation and integration”*.

The celebration also included a panel discussion on border issues and related challenges in both Africa and beyond. In this respect, presentations were made by Professor Anthony Asiwaju, President, African Regional Institute, Imeko, Nigeria; Mr. Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary-General, Association of European Border Regions (AEBR); Mr. Jose Elias Mucombo, Director, National Institute of the Sea and Boundaries, Maputo, Mozambique; and Mr. Jean Peyrony, Director-General, *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT)*, Paris – France. The celebration also included the screening of a documentary titled ***“African Borders; from barriers to bridges”***, a choreographic performance on “dancing across borders”, and a photo exhibition on “the making of African borders.”

Note to Editors

Introduction

Since African countries gained independence, the borders – which were drawn during the colonial period in a context of rivalries between European countries and their scramble for territories in Africa, have been a recurrent source of conflicts and disputes in the continent. Most of the borders are poorly defined. The location of strategic natural resources in cross-border areas poses additional challenges. This challenge was taken up early enough by African leaders who were inspired by the conviction that the achievement of greater unity and solidarity among African States and peoples requires the reduction of the burden of the borders separating them.

Political and Legal Instruments Guiding the AUBP

Member States adopted a number of political and legal instruments to guide their efforts in the management of border issues. In this respect, the following instruments are worth mentioning:

- Resolution AHG/Res.16(I) on border disputes between African States, adopted by the 1st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU, held in Cairo, Egypt, in July 1964;
- Article 4 (b) of the AU Constitutive Act;
- Resolution CM/Res.1069(XLIV) on peace and security in Africa through negotiated settlement of boundary disputes, adopted by the 44th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the OAU, held in Addis Ababa, in July 1986;
- Memorandum of Understanding on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), adopted by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002 [Decision CM/Dec.666(LXXVI)], which provides for the delineation and demarcation of African boundaries by 2012 where such an exercise has not yet taken place;
- Decision of the 8th Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa in January 2007, encouraging the Commission to pursue its efforts towards the structural prevention of conflicts, especially through the implementation of the AUBP.

As a follow-up to this decision, the Commission convened, in Addis Ababa, on 7 June 2007, the first-ever Conference of African Ministers in charge of border issues. The Conference adopted a Declaration on the AUBP and its Implementation Modalities, which was endorsed by the Executive Council in Accra. A

second meeting took place in Addis Ababa, on 25 March 2010. It adopted a Declaration on the Pursuit and Acceleration of the Implementation of the AUBP.

Justification for the Establishment of the AUBP

- To facilitate the delimitation and demarcation of the African borders, where such an exercise has not yet taken place. Indeed, the absence of clearly-delimited and marked borders gives rise to 'undefined zones', within which the application of national sovereignty poses problems, and constitutes a real obstacle to the deepening of the integration process;
- To address cross-border criminal activities through pragmatic border management;
- To consolidate the gains made in the regional integration process, as demonstrated by the existence of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and of numerous large-scale cooperation initiatives;
- To facilitate the development of cross-border integration dynamics, which are sustained by local stakeholders.

AUBP Vision

A united and integrated Africa, with peaceful, open and prosperous borders

AUBP Mission

The prevention and resolution of border-related disputes and the promotion of regional and continental integration, which constitute a tool in the structural prevention of conflicts in Africa

The Strategic Objectives of the AUBP

- Facilitating and supporting the delimitation and demarcation of African boundaries where such exercise has not yet taken place;
- Reinforcing the integration process, within the framework of the RECs and other large-scale cooperation initiatives;
- Developing, within the framework of the RECs and other regional integration initiatives, local cross-border cooperation;
- Building the capacities of member states in border management, as well as in border studies and research;

- Advising the Commission and other organs of the African Union on border-related matters.

AUBP Implementation Modalities

The AUBP is being implemented at national, regional and continental levels, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity and respect of the sovereignty of States.

- a) The delimitation, demarcation and management of boundaries depend primarily on the sovereign decision of the States. The AUBP is closely working with States to undertake and pursue bilateral negotiations on all issues relating to the delimitation, demarcation and management of their borders, while aiming to protect and promote the interests and rights of border populations. The AUBP is assisting the States in mobilizing the necessary resources and expertise needed to delimit, demarcate and manage their boundaries.
- b) Local stakeholders are the primary drivers and key players of cross-border cooperation. The AUBP is working closely with RECs to facilitate local initiatives that promote cross-border cooperation. The AUBP, in partnership with the RECs, is planning to establish regional funds to finance cross-border cooperation, and has prepared a Convention on Cross-border Cooperation that will be submitted to the relevant AU policy organs for consideration and adoption. The AUBP is also taking the necessary steps to ensure that cross-border cooperation is included in the major international initiatives launched in favour of the continent, as well as play a coordination role and facilitate the exchange of information and good practices among the RECs.
- c) The AUBP is assisting African countries to develop their capacities in the areas of border delimitation, demarcation and management. It is doing this by carrying out an inventory of African institutions that offer training in these domains, exploring avenues for collaboration with relevant training centres outside Africa, and designing a capacity building programme.
- d) Since boundary making and maintenance are cooperative undertakings that require various stakeholders to work together, the AUBP is forging partnerships of locals, states and other stakeholders, particularly the United Nations, as well as former colonial powers that have records on African boundaries. The AUBP is also building networks and establishing partnerships with research and training institutes to build the capacities of States to delimit demarcate and manage their boundaries.
- e) In view of the fact that the exercises of delimiting, demarcating and managing boundaries are very expensive and highly technical, the AUBP is working closely with States and RECs to mobilize the required resources and any other necessary support needed to delimit, demarcate and manage African boundaries.

Achievements of AUBP

Since its inception, the AUBP:

- has carried out Regional sensitization workshops, between September 2008 and October 2009, in partnership with the RECs, in Kampala (Eastern Africa), Algiers (North Africa), Libreville (Central Africa) Ouagadougou (West Africa) and Windhoek (Southern Africa);
- is carrying out a comprehensive survey of African borders through a questionnaire sent to all Member States, in order to facilitate the delimitation and demarcation of African borders. So far, thirty Member States have submitted their responses to the questionnaire.
- is establishing a Boundary Information System to facilitate the utilization of the information received in response to the questionnaire, and to archive historical records, treaties and maps;
- has published an ***AUBP Practical Handbook on Delimitation and Demarcation***;
- has produced a Brochure on AUBP and a Booklet on the Declaration on the AUBP and its Implementation Modalities.
- has produced a Documentary entitled *African Borders: from barriers to bridges*;
- is sponsoring research on borders by African scholars
- has partnered with GiZ to support delimitation and demarcation in eight African countries;
- has entered in to Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT) and the African Borderland Research Network (ABORNE) ; and,
- is assisting in the delimitation and demarcation of the North-South Sudan Border.

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