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Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 517 700 Fax : 517844

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REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 and the two wars in The Congo (1996-1997 and 1998-1999), the OAU adopted, between 1995 and 1998, several resolutions underscoring the need to organize an International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the root causes of these tragic events, which contributed to the weakening and destabilization of many countries in the region. To this end, the Secretary General of the OAU was requested to work, in close collaboration with the United Nations Secretary General, in organizing the Conference.

2. The idea of organizing an International Conference was informed by many factors: the regional character of conflicts experienced in countries of the region; the fact that the populations of the region are so closely linked in ethnic and cultural terms that any problem affecting one country tends to spread rapidly, thus creating a dynamic of conflict throughout the region; the observation that solutions to the conflicts and instability of many countries of the region should be sought within a regional framework.

3. In 1998, following the outbreak of the second war in The Congo, the United Nations was also in favour of organizing an International Conference on the region. In 1999, the UN Secretary General appointed a Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region. In February and June 2000, the Security Council adopted Resolutions 1291 and 1304 successively «on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo», in which it acknowledged that the security situation in that country constituted a menace to international peace and security, and that «there was a need to organize, at the appropriate time, under the auspices of the United Nations Organization and the Organization of African Unity, an International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, in which all the governments of the region and all other parties concerned would participate».

4. The present report reviews developments in the preparatory process of the Conference. It also gives an account of the support from the international community as well as the current and future role of the AU in the process.

II. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PREPARATORY PROCESS OF THE CONFERENCE

5. Pursuant to the resolutions mentioned above, the OAU and the UN undertook to actively prepare the Conference. In December 2001, the two organizations fielded a joint mission to the region, to garner the opinions of the authorities of the countries visited on the appropriateness of convening such a conference. In the light of these contacts and positive developments in the different peace processes, particularly the implementation of the Arusha Agreement (for Burundi) and the Lusaka Agreement (for the Democratic Republic of Congo), the necessary conditions were met to pursue consultations with the countries and other parties concerned.

6. During the second joint mission to consult the Heads of State of countries of the region and their «neighbours and allies» carried out from 12 November to 3 December 2002, a consensus was reached on the fact that the Conference should be prepared and organized based on its «ownership» by the countries of the region and partnership among the various stakeholders. It was also agreed that the Conference process would comprise a preparatory stage (including previous consultations), the Conference proper and the implementation of decisions and recommendations resulting from the Conference. The authorities of the countries visited also accepted the principle of appointing senior executives as focal points of the preparatory process of the Conference (they are the National Coordinators), and taking the necessary steps to establish National Preparatory Committees.

7. From 17 March to 16 April 2003, a third joint mission visited neighbouring countries, as well as many other «friendly» countries of the Great Lakes Region. The objective of the mission was to brief the «neighbouring» and «friendly» countries on the proposed Conference, the results of contacts initiated with the countries «concerned» and enlist their support for the Conference process.

8. Joint missions to sensitize on, and elicit support for the preparatory process of the Conference were subsequently extended to bilateral and multilateral partners of the process. All the parties consulted are now actively supporting the process, the preparations for which have speeded up considerably.

9. The issue of refugees and displaced persons was included in the themes to be addressed by the Conference, since this issue was recognized as being closely linked with the prevailing crisis in many countries of the region. The final themes of the Conference are as follows: peace and security; democracy and good governance; economic development and regional integration; and social and humanitarian issues.

10. In Decision EX/CL/Dec. 43 (III) on the Proposed International Conference on the Great Lakes Region of the 3^d Ordinary Session of the Executive Council held in Maputo, Mozambique, in July 2003, Council reiterated the support of the African Union for the proposed International Conference, emphasizing that this Conference will provide a holistic and concerted approach to tackle the recurring instability in the region.

11. As part of the follow-up on this decision, the Commission continued to work actively to prepare the Conference, in concert with the Special Representative of UN Secretary General for the Great Lakes Region. After the first meeting of National Coordinators (NC) in June 2003, the second NC meeting was held in Nairobi on 19 September 2004, under the joint chairmanship of my Special Envoy, Mr. Keli Walubita and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Mr. Ibrahima Fall. This second NC meeting adopted a provisional calendar of preparatory meetings of the Conference and decided to enlarge the circle of countries directly concerned by the Conference or «core countries» to include Zambia. To date, the core countries are the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

12. On 12 and 13 January 2004, the Commission of the African Union hosted the First Meeting of the Regional Economic Communities of the countries of the Great Lakes Region expanded to include the NC. The objectives of the meeting were to consider the possible areas of cooperation and synergy among the RECs, the Conference process and NEPAD. Co-chaired by my Special Envoy and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, the meeting, among other decisions, adopted

the principle of co-opting all the countries neighbouring «core» countries; it also adopted a new calendar of preparatory meetings, scheduling the 1st Summit of the Conference in November 2004, in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, and the 2nd Summit in June 2005, in Nairobi, Kenya. The two Summits will be preceded by a series of preparatory meetings, including two at ministerial level (November 2004 in Kigali, and in Bujumbura in 2005).

13. On 10 March 2004, the Commission hosted the Second Meeting of the Regional Economic Communities of the countries of the Great Lakes Region expanded to include the NC. The session of 10 March, like the first meeting, was co-chaired by the AU and the UN. In addition to the NC of «core» countries, the meeting brought together representatives of ECCAS, COMESA, IGAD, SADC, EAC and CEMAC. Other participants in the meeting as invitees included ADB, NEPAD, OIF, MONUC, ECA, the Embassies of the African Union Troika, Canada and the Netherlands as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region.

III. CONTRIBUTION OF THE AFRICAN UNION TO THE PREPARATORY PROCESS OF THE CONFERENCE

14. The OAU/AU participated actively in the preparatory process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. In this regard, the Commission participated, together with the United Nations, in all the initiatives and measures that made it possible achieve the progress made to date. In compliance with the recommendations of the Executive Council, I also allocated the sum of US\$50,000 to the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the Great Lakes Region, to contribute in financing some programmes and activities scheduled as part of the preparatory process of the Conference. In the same context, in December 2003, I formalized the appointment of my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, a duty that the latter had been discharging on an *Ad Hoc* basis.

15. In its Decision Ex/CL/43(III), the Executive Council encouraged me to take all the necessary measures to support the preparatory process, thereby contributing to the success of the Conference. To enable the Commission to effectively play its expected role, I initiated the necessary consultations to open an African Union Liaison Office for the Great Lakes Region in Nairobi. Opening such an Office will enable the Commission to ensure permanent liaison with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, and also work more actively with the

stakeholders of the process (the authorities of the countries of the region), as well as the development partners (United Nations, bilateral and multilateral partners). Lastly, the opening of the Liaison Office would give more visibility to the action of the African Union in the preparatory process of the Conference, during its organization and in the implementation of ensuing decisions.

16. Furthermore, from its competence on the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Office would have the mandate to support the peace process in Somalia and The Sudan. The Office will be endowed with staff, including an Office Head, officers in charge of the each of the domains covered by the Office. Locally recruited staff will support these international officers.

17. The requisite budget for opening the Office for one year amounts to US\$1,051,488 (see attached budget estimate). This budget will be financed from the Peace Fund and extra-budgetary resources, including the contribution proposed by the Group of Friends of Region to the Joint Secretariat (AU/UN) of the preparatory process of the Conference. Contacts in this regard have already been made with Canada, which co-chairs the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region.

IV. SUPPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TOWARDS THE PREPARATORY PROCESS OF THE CONFERENCE

18. In its Maputo Session, the Executive Council urgently appealed to the international community, especially bilateral and multilateral development partners to provide their support and political, diplomatic, technical and financial assistance towards the preparation, holding and follow-up on the Conference, thereby ensuring its success. To this end, the UN Security Council held an open session on the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in New York, on 20 November 2003. The Commission was represented at the meeting by my Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region.

19. In a declaration adopted at the end of the session, the Chairman of Council emphasized the pertinence for the Conference of the solemn Declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation (CSSDCA) and the framework provided by NEPAD. He welcomed the dynamic partnership between the United Nations and the

African Union, and appealed to the international community to provide solid political and diplomatic support, as well as appropriate technical and financial assistance to ensure the effective preparation of the Conference, that it is held in due course and that it is complemented by effective follow-up measures.

20. Joint AU/UN missions to sensitize and enlist support from development partners facilitated the establishment of the «Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region». Co-chaired by Canada and The Netherlands, the Group comprises about thirty countries (including 3 African) and about ten international organizations. The Group held its first meeting on 4 December 2003 in Geneva. The meeting in which the Commission was represented by my Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, made important commitments, including political and diplomatic support for ongoing efforts, and technical and financial assistance to the Joint Secretariat (AU/UN) in the preparatory process of the Conference and to the Preparatory Committees of the Conference in seven «core» countries.

21. The Group held its second meeting in The Hague on 12 March 2004, and among other things, decided on the modalities of mobilizing funds. It also put in place a system for funding projects and programmes of the preparatory process of the Conference. The Commission of the African Union participated in the meeting through my Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The preparatory process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region is now well advanced. I would like to express my satisfaction at the progress achieved, progress which was made possible thanks to the commitment of countries of the region and the active partnership between the United Nations and the African Union.

23. I would also like to express my satisfaction at the invaluable support of the international community. In this regard, I wish to mention the establishment of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region and express my appreciation to Canada and The Netherlands for the key role they play as co-chairs of the Group.

24. The African Union should strengthen the role it plays alongside the United Nations to facilitate the successful completion of the process and create conditions for the implementation of the decisions of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. To this end, the backing of the Peace and Security Council for efforts underway, including the proposed opening of a Liaison Office would be additional proof of the African Union's commitment to the preparatory process of the Conference, as well as the economic and social development of the countries of the Great Lakes Region.