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16th ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AU ASSEMBLY OPENS WITH A FOCUS ON SHARED VALUES

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 31 January 2011- The 16th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union started in Addis Ababa today. Heads of State and Government or their accredited representatives are meeting under the theme of “Towards greater unity and integration through shared values”.

The opening session of the Assembly was chaired by outgoing Chairperson of the AU President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi. He congratulated Heads of State and Government who were elected/ re-elected in 2010. These include Presidents Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, Ikililou Dhoinini of the Comoros and Alpha Conde of Guinea. Both Mr. Mutharika and AUC Chairperson Mr Jean Ping congratulated Guinea for organizing a free and fair election.

In his address to the Assembly, his sixth since he took over as AUC Chair, Mr. Ping reported on the activities of the Commission from July to December 2010.

On Cote D'Ivoire, the Chairperson said a high level panel comprising 5 heads of state, and leaders of the AUC and ECOWAS has been put in place by the AU Peace and Security Council to see to it that peace and democracy prevail. On Tunisia, he expressed the hope that free and fair elections will be organized, adding that the Commission is also closely following the situation in Egypt. He said Somalia remains a source of concern and went on to commend the expected arrival of Ugandan and Guinean forces to beef up the AMISOM force. “We are looking to have 12 000 forces on the ground in the next few months”, he added.

On Sudan, Mr. Ping said the recent referendum on independence for South Sudan will open a new and delicate reality for the country, the region and Africa. In the post referendum period, he stressed that it is necessary for the international community, the AU and the United Nations, to redouble their efforts to assist the country to realize positive change.

Mr. Ping's report also included work being done by the AUC to realize the objectives set out in its strategic plan (2009-2012). In the six months under review, the Commission, he said, pursued programmes related to development and regional integration and highlighted the Programme for Infrastructure and Development in Africa (PIDA) as well as cooperation with the Regional Economic Communities and the international community. He also mentioned the Pan African University project, which he said is progressing well. Other notable initiatives undertaken by the AUC included the launch of the African Women's Decade 2011-2020; the promotion of maternal, neo natal and child health and the creation of the African Youth Volunteer Corps.

The Chairperson gave special mention to the Common African Agricultural Development programme (CAADP), commended the 22 states that have signed the CAADP compacts so far and encouraged other member states to follow suit. He congratulated Ethiopian Prime Minister Mr. Meles Zenawi for his role as the African spokesperson at the Cancun summit on climate change.

Mr. Ping highlighted the urgency required to operationalise the African financial institutions (the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund, and the African Investment Bank) noting that only

15 ratifications have so far been received for the formation of the African Investment Bank. He also highlighted the on going initiatives to find alternative sources of financing for the AU.

With regard to the theme of the summit on shared values, the Chairperson said the AUC had left no stone unturned in preparation and that it had held consultations with many stakeholders. It had also continued its engagement with partners as evidenced by the Afro Arab summit, Africa EU summit and its attendance of the G20 meetings.

Finally, the Chairperson reiterated the Commission's commitment to work closely with member states and all stakeholders so that all objectives are met in accordance with the provisions.

The UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki Moon, in his address, placed emphasis on the need to achieve peace and security in Africa. In addition to Sudan, Cote D'Ivoire, Tunisia, Egypt and Somalia, Mr. Ban also mentioned the need to facilitate the transition to constitutional order in Niger.

The UN SG commended Africa for continuing on a positive economic trajectory, observing that Africa is rebounding stronger and faster than anticipated. Six of the world's fastest growing economies are in Sub Saharan Africa and some successes have been registered in primary school enrollment. There has been a decline in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and success in the eradication of polio and in the fight against HIV/AIDS. He added that the way to ensure sustained progress is by putting special focus on three areas; women, youth and the private sector.

French president Mr. Nicholas Sarkozy was a special guest of the 16th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. His country is due to take over the presidency of the G8. He had a number of key points. First was that France stands ready to support Africa's bid for a seat at the UN Security Council: secondly, that Africa must take charge of its destiny and thirdly, that leaders must take the views of their populations on board as they govern. He also highlighted the need for regulation of the financial and food markets to stop massive speculation and increases in food prices. Lastly, Mr. Sarkozy spoke about the need for innovative financing, pledging that by the end of the year France will have innovative financing for Africa. In this respect, he said France requires Africa's support in the G20.

The other speaker at the opening ceremony was Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Before ending the opening ceremony, the Heads of State and Government elected the bureau of their 16th Ordinary session as follows:

Chair	Central Africa	Equatorial Guinea
1 st Chair	West Africa	Mali
2 nd Vice Chair	East Africa	Rwanda
3 rd Vice Chair	North Africa	Egypt
Rapporteur	Southern Africa	Malawi

Accordingly, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea was inaugurated as the Chairperson of the bureau of the 16th Ordinary Session. The Assembly meeting will conclude on 31 January.

In the meantime, the AU awarded its second scientific awards worth \$100 000 to two scientists as a means of encouraging scientific research. Both scientists are from Egypt.

Journalists are invited to cover the closing ceremony of the Assembly on 31 January as well as the public sessions. Programmes and other documents are available on <http://au.int/en/summit/16thsummit>