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**MEETING OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS
ON EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT
PREVENTION**

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**MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF CONFLICT PREVENTION IN
AFRICA – TOWARDS THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE
CONTINENTAL EARLY WARNING SYSTEM**

CONCEPT PAPER

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1. One of the core objectives of the African Union (AU) is the promotion of peace, security, and stability on the Continent, as spelt out in article 3 (f) of the AU Constitutive Act. To strengthen the AU's capacity in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, Member States adopted, in July 2002, in Durban, South Africa, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which entered into force in December 2003. The Protocol, in article 2 (1), defines the PSC as "a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa".

Provisions of the PSC Protocol and subsequent efforts by the AU to establish the Continental Early Warning System

2. Article 12 of the PSC Protocol provides for the establishment of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), in order to facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts in Africa. As stipulated in article 12 (2) of the Protocol, the CEWS shall consist of:

- (i) an observation and monitoring centre, to be known as "the Situation Room", which is located at the Conflict Management Division of the African Union and is responsible for data collection and analysis; and
- (ii) the observation and monitoring units of the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (hereunder the Regional Mechanisms), which shall be linked directly through appropriate means of communication to the Situation Room and which shall collect and process data at their level and transmit the same to the Situation Room.

3. In addition, article 12 (3) of the Protocol requires the Commission to also collaborate with the United Nations and its agencies, other relevant international organizations, research centers, academic institutions and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to facilitate the effective functioning of the CEWS, while article 12 (4) calls for the development of an early warning module based on clearly defined and accepted political, economic, social, military and humanitarian indicators, which shall be used to analyze developments within the continent and to recommend the best course of action (article 12). Article 12 (5) stipulates that the Chairperson of the Commission shall use the information gathered through the Early Warning System timeously to advise the PSC on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa and recommend the best course of action; he shall also use this information for the execution of the responsibilities and functions entrusted to him/her under the Protocol. The Member States shall commit themselves to facilitate early action by the PSC and/or the Chairperson of the Commission based on early warning information [Art.12 (6)]. Finally, article 12 (7) stipulates that the Chairperson of the Commission, in consultation with Member States, the Regional Mechanisms, the United Nations and other relevant institutions, shall work out the practical details for the establishment of the CEWS and take all the steps required for its effective functioning.

4. At its session held in Maputo, in July 2003, the Assembly of Heads of States and Government adopted decision Assembly/AU/Dec.16(ii) on the Operationalization of the PSC Protocol, inviting the Commission to, *inter alia*, take the necessary steps

for the establishment of the CEWS. It was as a follow-up to this decision that the Commission organized a workshop on the establishment of the CEWS, from 30 to 31 October 2003, in Addis Ababa. The workshop made the following recommendations:

- a) begin with significant threats of violence and loss of life as the entry point for the AU's early warning system;
- b) build a measurable, verifiable and standard database that is simple, user friendly, based on multi-level and field-based sources;
- c) develop an analytical capacity and expertise within the AU on early warning, conflict prevention and conflict management; and
- d) establish diagnostic linkages between analysis and desired outcomes so as to provide the AU with regular reports on conflict situations.

5. Based on the above recommendations, the Commission developed, in July 2005, a draft Roadmap for the Operationalization of the CEWS. The purpose of the Roadmap is to propose an operational, cost-effective CEWS within the obligations stipulated by the PSC Protocol, as well as the associated key steps and requirements necessary for the implementation of the early warning system.

6. The draft Roadmap emphasises that the objective of the CEWS should be the provision of timely advice on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security to enable the development of appropriate response strategies to prevent or limit the destructive effects of violent conflicts. The Roadmap covers, among others, the following areas: a) data collection, b) strategic analysis of the data and development of an indicators module, c) early warning reports and engagement with decision-makers, and d) co-ordination and collaboration between the AU, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other key stakeholders. The Roadmap contains a tentative timeframe for the implementation and operationalization of the CEWS.

7. As indicated above, the Situation Room is a key element of the CEWS. Its tasks include monitoring situations of potential and actual conflicts, as well as post-conflict situations on the continent and other relevant developments, from both primary sources (AU field missions) and internet based media sources; producing several kinds of reports either on a regular or *ad hoc* basis; serving as a point of contact between the AU Headquarters, on the one hand, the field missions, Member States and other organizations and entities; storing and disseminating information. The Situation Room is manned on a 24 hours basis during weekdays and functions until 9 p.m. during the weekends.

8. Efforts have been made and continue to be made to enhance and strengthen the capacity of the Situation Room. This includes the procurement of new equipment and a greater access to online information, to provide timely and up to date information and analysis on issues of relevance to the mandate of the Peace and Security Department. Steps have also been taken to enhance the human resource capacity of the Situation Room, including through on-the-job training and staff exchange programmes with the RECs and the United Nations. The Situation Room is currently staffed by eight Situation Room assistants responsible for data collection and dissemination, a coordinator responsible for coordinating the overall activities of the Situation Room and a communications clerk responsible for dispatching official communications and building and maintaining a database of the contact details of Member States and other relevant entities.

Efforts by the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution

9. The Regional Mechanism have also taken steps to develop early warning systems, though they are at different stages in their efforts, as shown below:

(i) Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

10. The ECOWAS Peace and Security Observation System was established by the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, adopted in 1999. The system consists of an Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC), which is based at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, as well as of four Zonal Offices, which, gathering information from their focal areas on a daily basis, report to the OMC. The OMC collects and processes data and analysis, and compiles reports, which are submitted to the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS. Currently, ECOWAS is in the process of operationalizing its early warning system both in terms of technical issues and human resources. The political will to implement the EWS has been affirmed by the Heads of State. ECOWAS has established key partnership with the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) in the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). It has identified 15 Member States monitors and 15 civil society monitors for each country.

11. In its efforts to enhance the capacity of the four Zonal Offices, the Secretariat plans to acquire appropriate equipments and to establish a satellite communication system connecting the Executive Secretary, the Zonal Offices, and ECOWAS Investment and Development Bank (EBID / BIDC) based in Lomé, Togo. It has also plans to acquire a Geographic Information System (GIS) to be integrated into the ECOWAS early warning system.

(ii) Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

12. ECCAS is in the process of establishing a comprehensive early warning system, which is the Central African Early Warning Mechanism (MARAC). MARAC (Mécanisme d'Alerte Rapide en Afrique Centrale) has been created on the basis of a Protocol relating to the structure and functioning of the Peace and Security Council of Central Africa. As outlined in the Protocol, MARAC "shall be responsible for data collection and analysis in order to prevent crises and conflicts". ECCAS will establish a national network of offices that will form an integral part of MARAC. The system, when fully operational, will have a staff of 24 with inter-disciplinary experts covering thematic areas. MARAC will have a Situation Room, and operating procedures and standards that are being developed to support the Mechanism.

(iii) Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

13. IGAD has established a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN). CEWARN's mandate is "to receive and share information concerning potential violent conflicts as well as their outbreak and escalation in the IGAD sub-region." Since June 2003, CEWARN has been monitoring and tracking cross-border pastoral and related conflicts in the two pilot areas of the Karamoja and Somali Clusters; these pilot areas are now being expanded. CEWARN has an information gathering and analysis tool known as the CEWARN Reporter, used for coding,

graphing and analysis of data. The tasks of CEWARN include collecting data and producing reports, which are eventually discussed by Member States. CEWARN produces Country Updates, from Situation and Incident Reports, four times a year. The reports provide response recommendations. IGAD is planning to expand the Mechanism to cover other potential areas, and is developing a new strategy for CEWARN. Currently, CEWARN is in the process of mobilising funds to support the increased activities envisaged under the new strategy.

(iv) East African Community (EAC)

14. The EAC has not yet put into practice an early warning system, but has developed a draft Protocol on Early Warning and Response Mechanism. The Protocol seeks to address issues that cut across inter-state security, inter-state defence and intra state conflicts that emanate from cattle rustling, smuggling and illegal trade; poverty and economic inequalities; human rights violations in partner states; sharing of cross border and intra state natural resources and land, among others. The Draft Protocol establishes an institutional mechanism through which the protocol shall be implemented, including policy arm, administrative arm, the technical arm, the Regional Centre for Early Warning, the Early Warning Units situated within the Partner States. It is envisaged that the Early Warning Centre will be situated at the EAC Hqs fully equipped with a situation Room and human capacity and linked with the national Early Warning Units.

15. The development of the early warning mechanism calls for the convening of workshops for national and regional stakeholders for validation of the Protocol to be completed by 2007. In order to put in place its EWS, EAC plans to recruit analysts, early warning specialists, national focal points, as well as the acquisition of ICT infrastructure. The framework for Conflict early warning will work hand in hand with the proposed mechanism for conflict prevention management and resolution.

(v) Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

16. COMESA has not yet put in place an early warning system, but is in the process of conceptualizing one. COMESA has the mandate to deal with conflict prevention through preventive diplomacy and implicit in this is the role of conflict early warning and response. Taking into consideration the conflict issues in the sub-region, COMESA core competence COMESA proposes to mainly focuses on economic-related issues to ensure that the region benefits from the trade of its natural resources. The organization has already put in place structures through which its early warning system will be able to operate. These structures include a rigorous process of enhancing the role of civil society and the private sector in its program on peace and security. In its efforts to put in place a functioning early warning system, COMESA has plans to recruit analysts, Situation Room staff, Member Country desk officers, and plans to open regional centres/offices. COMESA is also in the process of acquiring ICT infrastructure that will link to Member states together and to COMESA, which will also benefit Early Warning.

(vi) Community of Sahelo Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

17. CEN-SAD does not have an operating early warning system so far, but the Secretariat is preparing a framework for the eventual establishment of an Early Warning Mechanism. The organization has developed a Protocol on a Mechanism of Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflict. Under the Protocol, there is

provision for the establishment of a Regional Peace and Security Observation System, which will have a Situation Centre. In order to put in place its early warning system, CEN-SAD plans to hold several seminars involving the Secretariat staff, senior officers drawn from External Affairs and Defense and Security establishments, as well as civil society groups, including women and religious leaders.

(vii) Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)

18. SADC is developing a system for early warning, which is integrated in the intelligence community and based on classified information. The SADC system is based on the establishment of the National Early Warning Centres (NECW) in each of the Member States and a Regional Early Warning Centre (REWC), based in Gaborone, Botswana. A Senior Strategic Analyst for the REWC has been recruited and the process of developing conflict indicators was completed and is awaiting approval by the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC). The organization tries to address threats and conflicts of a socio-economic nature. SADC is in the process of establishing a Situation Room and recruiting Analysts.

Consultative Workshop on Early Warning

19. In order to take stock of the initiatives taken both at continental and regional level, the Commission organized, from 25 to 27 April 2006, a consultative workshop on early warning, which included participants from the RECs, United Nations agencies and other key stakeholders. The workshop made, among others, the following recommendations:

(a) Data collection:

- generate primary data beyond African Union and its Field Mission's sources, including civil society, universities, and research institutions;
- develop a system of trend-tracking;
- make use of automatic public news clipping systems;
- develop a system of grading sources and reports to diminish information overflow and to increase work efficiency in the Early Warning Unit;
- make more efficient use of IT technology to foster the development of compressed products (briefs, reports, etc.) for end-users;
- rationalize the work of early warning systems focusing on different issues (conflict prevention, food security i.e.) to avoid duplications (especially in the establishment of data-bases).

(b) Strategic Analysis:

- develop a systematic framework of analysis;
- define a limited number of easy-to-monitor conflict- or case-specific indicators (through country-specific analyses);
- link indicators to the standards agreed upon in the context of the African Peer Review Mechanism and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), as approved by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in July 2002;

- focus on both immediate threats to human security and on underlying structural causes of conflict;
- strengthen analytical capacities to re-contextualise and to adjust country-specific analyses;
- enhance capacity building to ensure quality control (tailored trainings for different levels of staff within the Early Warning Unit).

(c) Comparative Indicators of the AU CEWS and the RECs:

- do not replace efforts already accomplished by the RECs in their conflict early warning initiatives;
- develop a continental framework of information gathering and analysis which is supplementary to the RECs.

(d) Coordination & Collaboration between the AU CEWS and the RECs:

- agree on a division of labor concerning sub-national data with RECs assisting in adding information on AU's secure website ;
- ensure regular and secure exchange of selected early warning briefs and reports ;
- hold annual early warning meetings with rotating hosts (RECs), facilitated through AU Commission;
- continue the exchange of personnel with RECs and other early warning systems ;
- initiate joint trainings / capacity building for RECs / AUC personnel;
- establish focal points on early warning systems within AUC, every REC and at national level ;
- develop a system on how to treat classified information;
- integrate key workshop recommendations into the Memorandum of Understanding between the RECs and the AUC;
- ensure interaction of RECs and African Union with key partners in civil society, UN institutions, universities, research institutions, etc.

(e) Early Warning Reports, Engagement with decision-makers and response options:

- engage information gathering personnel with decision-makers;
- enhance the diversity of information provided to decision-makers: reports, personal briefings, etc;
- broaden the process of engagement with decision makers to include other groups such as civil society and research institutions, to raise critical points otherwise too sensitive to be brought in;
- in addition to country reports, provide reports on security situations in the five regions (this will make it possible to include situations of potential conflict, which are not yet visible, as well as related issues) ;
- develop a generic list of policy options ;
- integrate policy initiatives and recommendations coming from the Panel of the Wise, the Pan-African Parliament and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

20. The 57th meeting of the PSC, held on 21 June 2006, reviewed the status of the establishment of the continental peace and security architecture. On that occasion, the PSC urged the Commission to hasten the process of implementation towards the full realization of the continental peace and security architecture, including the CEWS.

Meeting of Governmental Experts on Early Warning

21. It is against this background that the Commission is organizing the present meeting of governmental experts on early warning and conflict prevention. The objectives of the meeting are as follows: a) to take stock of the progress made so far towards the establishment of the CEWS and the difficulties encountered; b) to examine international experiences on early warning and their relevance to Africa's efforts to fully operationalize the CEWS; c) to agree on the key steps that should be taken for the full operationalization of the CEWS, including the collection of data, strategic analysis of the data collected, through an appropriate CEWS indicators module, early warning reports and engagement with decision-makers, and the coordination and collaboration with the Regional Mechanisms and other stakeholders on conflict prevention and early warning in Africa; d) and to adopt a roadmap that will clearly spell out the steps to be taken by each of the stakeholders, as well as the timelines for implementation towards the operationalization of the CEWS.

22. In addition to Member States, the meeting includes participants from the RECs, African research centers, academic institutions, and NGOs. A number of international organizations have also been invited to participate as observers.

23. Several documents have been prepared for this meeting. They are of two types: first, background documents, which do not necessarily reflect AU views and are intended to provide the participants with general information pertaining to early warning; second, issue documents containing proposals by the Commission on the steps to be taken for the establishment of the CEWS, and that will serve as a basis for the decisions to be taken during the meeting.

24. The agenda of the meeting is divided into five sessions covering the following issues:

- Update on the status of the establishment of the CEWS;
- Overview of international experiences on Early Warning and their relevance to Africa;
- Elements of the Roadmap towards the effective operationalization of the CEWS.

CONCLUSION

The promise and need for a continental early warning system (CEWS) in Africa is considerable. The main interest in early warning is to identify situations with sufficient advance timing that preventative measures can be adopted by the AU, the RECs, and other key stakeholders which can reduce the likelihood or the severity of impending humanitarian disasters. In sum, the primary aim of the CEWS is preventative rather than simple forecasting. In this regard, the Meeting of Governmental Experts on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention is a critical step in the eventual operationalisation of the CEWS.