



PRESS RELEASE

THE 4TH MEETING OF THE AU-REGIONS STEERING COMMITTEE ON SALW & DDR OPENS AT COMESA HEADQUARTERS

Lusaka, 8 December 2014: The African Union (AU) – Regions Steering Committee on Small Arms and Lights Weapons (SALW) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) opened today its fourth meeting at the Secretariat of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), in Lusaka, Zambia. The meeting will conclude tomorrow, 9 December 2014.

The Steering Committee brings together the AU Commission, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Bodies with a SALW mandate, to enhance synergies in the control of the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking in SALW, as well as in DDR initiatives across the continent through sharing of information, identifying gaps and priorities and exploring avenues and opportunities for enhanced coordination and collaboration.

The meeting is being attended by COMESA, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Regional Center on Small Arms (RECSA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Other organizations attending the meeting as observers are: the European Union, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), the United Nations Department of Peace-Keeping Operations DPKO) and the World Bank Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Tarek A. Sharif, Head of the Defense and Security Division, reiterated that SALW remains the weapon of choice in armed conflict, crime and violence with devastating effects on safety, security and socio-economic development and called for stronger resolve to join efforts to prevent their unauthorized acquisition and use.

On behalf of the COMESA Secretariat, Mr. Brian Chigawa, Director of Legal and Institutional Affairs, welcomed the participants and expressed concern that the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking in SALW constitute a serious impediment to development, conflict management and resolution, contributing to attacks on peace-keepers and law enforcement agents, hijacking of humanitarian aid convoys and serious human rights violations. In this regard, he recognized the important and challenging task of the Steering Committee and commended its members on the work undertaken to date, reiterating COMESA's full support to its efforts.

The Guest of Honor at the opening ceremony, Mr. Chilufya Wanchinga, Chair of the Commission on SALW of the Republic of Zambia, expressed his country's recognition of the extent of the problem posed by the illicit proliferation and circulation of SALW and how disjointed and poorly managed efforts and responses cannot effectively tackle its increasing threat as well as the growing threat of terrorism. He therefore stressed the importance of the coordination efforts undertaken by the Steering Committee.

The meeting will review the activities of the members carried out in 2014 in support of their member states, and elaborate areas for cooperation in 2015. The meeting is expected to develop a number of recommendations to strengthen and expand interventions in the area of SALW and DDR. It is also expected that the meeting will develop concrete strategies and actions on how best to support member states in order to fully participate at the first Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty taking place in August 2015 in Mexico.

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