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PRESS RELEASE

THE AFRICAN UNION EXPRESSES DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE ABYEI TRADITIONAL LEADERS MEETING

The AU stresses the urgency of renewed efforts towards confidence building and reconciliation between the Abyei communities

Addis Ababa, 24 June 2015: The Commission of the African Union (AU) expresses disappointment over the postponement of the Abyei community leader's reconciliation meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa, from 20 to 24 June 2015, following a request by the Government of South Sudan. The meeting was intended to provide the Abyei stakeholders with a neutral venue and to have direct, open and frank discussions on key issues, in order to strengthen inter-communal relationships and facilitate stability and reconciliation in the Area.

The Commission wishes to recall the previous pronouncements of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) on the situation in the Abyei Area, in particular the communiqué issued by the 494th meeting of the PSC held on 24 March 2015. As a follow-up to that communiqué, the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee (AJOC) convened a meeting in Addis Ababa, from 29 to 30 March 2015, at the end of which the parties agreed, inter alia, to convene a traditional leader's reconciliation meeting, to be facilitated by the AJOC, the AU Commission and the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). In so doing, the AJOC was mindful of the need to involve the Ngok Dinka and Messiriya communities in addressing their common concerns.

Subsequently, the AU-designated AJOC Facilitator, Mr. Boitshoko Mokgatlhe, conducted extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders in the Sudan and South Sudan, as well as with UNISFA. In the course of those consultations, the parties indicated that their respective Governments had offered their full support for the convening of the traditional leaders meeting. UNISFA and the AU, on their part, agreed to make the necessary arrangements.

The Sudanese delegation arrived in Addis Ababa on 19 June 2015. Despite continued indications during the previous days by South Sudan that their community leaders would participate in the proposed reconciliation meeting, on 19 June 2015, the AJOC Facilitator was informed that the South Sudanese community leaders would not take part in the meeting in Addis Ababa and that they were requesting an indefinite postponement to resolve internal challenges relating to their participation. Without the participation of the South Sudanese delegation, the Commission was compelled to cancel the meeting. The AJOC Facilitator took advantage of the presence of the Sudanese delegation to exchange views with them on the challenges at hand. The Messiriya Chiefs underscored the importance of reconciliation with their brothers from the Ngok Dinka community.

They expressed their readiness to attend any subsequent meeting on this matter, and the hope that the Ngok Dinka representatives will also be in attendance.

The Commission stresses the urgency of the early holding of the traditional leaders meeting, in order to restore confidence and promote reconciliation among the Abyei communities. The Commission commends the Sudanese delegation for having positively responded to the AU's invitation, and looks forward to the full cooperation of the South Sudanese side. In the meantime, the Commission urges the Abyei communities to continue to exercise utmost restraint and to refrain from any action likely to heighten tension in the Area.

The Commission reiterates the AU's commitment to continue working with the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan, through the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), in the search for a lasting solution to the challenges in Abyei, within the framework of the relevant PSC decisions.

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