



PRESS STATEMENT

THE AU COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON WELCOMES THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND ANNOUNCES THE UPCOMING ENGAGEMENT OF THE AUHIP

Addis Ababa, 22 February 2017: The Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Dr. Nkosozena Dlamini-Zuma, welcomes the release and commutation of sentences of political prisoners by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement- North (SPLM-N).

On 8th March 2017, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, by a decree pardoned 193 political prisoners while reducing the sentences for 66 prisoners who were facing the death penalty. The total 259 prisoners come from several Darfur armed movements, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement – Mini Minawi (SLM-MM).

This was preceded by the release of 125 prisoners, on 4 March 2016, by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N) who had been in their custody, as a goodwill gesture to the Government of Sudan. The release took place with the facilitation of the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Chairperson is cognizant of fact that the release of political prisoners has been a critical sticking point in the negotiations between the Government and the armed movements. Therefore, she recognizes that this positive development will go a long way to create a conducive environment which will further advance the peace process.

She welcomes the plans of the African Union High Level-Implementation Panel on Sudan and South Sudan (AUHIP) to hold extensive consultations on Sudan's peace process with the Government of Sudan and various Sudanese stakeholders in Khartoum and Addis Ababa in March 2017.

The Chairperson notes that this round of consultations with the Parties is aimed at breaking the impasse that has persisted since the last round of negotiations in August 2016. She, therefore, appeals to the Government and the opposition parties to adhere to the spirit and principle of the Roadmap Agreement of 2016, to which they are all signatories, and reminds them that they bear the primary responsibility to bring peace to their beloved country and people.

The Chairperson urges the SPLM-N, in particular, to make the necessary concessions and accept without any further delay the US brokered proposal for humanitarian assistance in the Two Areas. This proposal will provide the much-needed relief to the population in the Two Areas and the parties have a responsibility to fulfill this need. This agreement will also

pave the way for the conclusion of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement that has long been awaited by the people of Sudan.

The Chairperson thanks the United Nations and IGAD for their unwavering support to the work of the Panel. She also acknowledges the very important role that has been played by AUHIP partners, and welcomes the recent statement by the Troika which speaks to the critical decisions that have to be made by the Parties in support of the work of the AUHIP. She is of the view that this constellation of efforts and support will, sooner than later, bear fruit in Sudan, through a peaceful resolution of all the outstanding issues in the peace processes.

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The AU Commission Chairperson Welcomes the Release of Political Prisoners and Announces the Upcoming Engagement of the AUHIP Addis Ababa, 22 February 2017

Peace and Security

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