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**REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION ON THE SITUATION
IN THE COMOROS SINCE THE 10TH ORDINARY SESSION OF
THE ASSEMBLY OF THE AFRICAN UNION HELD IN ADDIS ABABA
FROM 31 JANUARY TO 2 FEBRUARY 2008**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 117th meeting held on 28 March 2008, Council, after expressing satisfaction at the re-establishment of the authority of the Union of the Comoros in the Island of Anjouan, thus putting an end to the illegal regime of Colonel Mohamed Bacar, agreed to meet subsequently to consider modalities for the African Union to continue providing support to the authorities of the Union and those of the Autonomous Islands in order to consolidate peace and stability in the country and facilitate the search for a lasting solution to the institutional problems facing the new Comorian Entity.

2. This report, which is submitted to facilitate the deliberations of the Council, provides an account of the developments in the Comoros since the 10th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union held in Addis Ababa from 31 January to 2 February 2008. It contains recommendations on the modalities by which the AU could provide support to the efforts deployed to promote stability in the Comoros.

II. FOLLOW UP ON THE ASSEMBLY DECISION ON THE SITUATION IN THE COMOROS

3. The 10th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union took place against the background of the rejection by Colonel Bacar of all the crisis exit proposals submitted by the AU, and despite the sanctions imposed by Council since 10 October 2007. In his statement before the Assembly, the Head of State of the Comoros solicited Member States' support for his country's efforts to re-establish, in a sustainable manner, the authority of the State of the Comoros in Anjouan. He announced, to this end, his Government's determination to use all available means, including force, given the failure of all attempts to resolve the Anjouanese crisis peacefully.

4. In its decision *Assembly/Dec.186 (X)* on the situation in the Comoros, the Assembly, among other things:

- regretted that all the efforts thus far deployed to resolve the crisis in the Comoros have not yielded the expected positive response from the illegal authorities of Anjouan and stressed that the persistence of that situation constituted a serious threat to the reconciliation process in the Comoros;
- expressed its understanding of the frustration of the Comorian population and the authorities of the Union in view of the absence of tangible progress regarding the

restoration of State authority in Anjouan and the organization of free, fair and transparent elections, as stipulated in the relevant Communiqués of the Ministerial Committee of the countries of the region;

- requested all Member States capable of doing so to provide the necessary support to the Comorian Government in its efforts to restore, as quickly as possible, the authority of the Union in Anjouan and to put an end to the crisis born out of the persistent refusal by the illegal authorities of Anjouan to comply with the relevant texts governing the functioning of the Union of the Comoros. In this regard, the Assembly requested Council and the Commission to mobilize the assistance of Member States to the Union of the Comoros.

5. Pursuant to the above-mentioned Assembly decision, the Chairperson of the Executive Council, Bernard K. Membe, Foreign Minister of the United Republic of Tanzania, took the initiative to convene in Addis Ababa on 20 February 2008, a meeting of the Foreign and Defense Ministers, as well as other senior officials of the countries that had expressed readiness to respond positively to the request for assistance made by the President of the Union of the Comoros. Apart from Tanzania, the countries involved were Libya, Senegal and the Sudan. The Government of the Union of the Comoros was also represented at the meeting. In accordance with the Assembly decision, the Commission provided the necessary assistance towards the organization of that meeting and contributed to its deliberations.

6. The meeting was also held in the context of the pertinent decisions of Council, particularly those adopted at its 95th meeting on 10 October 2007, which mandated the African Union Electoral and Security Assistance Mission (MAES) to the Comoros (MAES) to “deploy in Anjouan in order to undertake the following:

- (i) facilitate the organization, in Anjouan, of the first round of the election of the President of the Island, in accordance with the Constitution and relevant electoral legislation, and provide the requisite security for free, fair and transparent elections;
- (ii) supervise the encampment of the elements of the Anjouanese Gendarmerie, which will, in no way, be involved in the supervision of the electoral process, as well as their disarmament and integration into the Comorian National Army;
- (iii) assist in the establishment in Anjouan of an internal security force in accordance with the Constitution of the Union, and
- (iv) facilitate the restoration of the authority of the Union in Anjouan.”

7. The Addis Ababa meeting reiterated AU’s commitment to the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Comoros. It underscored its understanding of the frustration of the people and authorities of the Comoros in the face of lack of tangible

progress on the issue of the re-establishment of State authority in Anjouan and the organization of free, fair and transparent elections. The meeting was briefed on recent developments in Anjouan, then characterized by numerous human rights violations perpetrated by the illegal authorities of the Island and the repressive measures unleashed against all those suspected of favoring the return to normalcy in the Island.

8. The meeting considered the modalities of implementing the Assembly decision and agreed on practical, military and security measures to give effect to the decision of the Government of the Union of the Comoros to re-establish its authority in Anjouan. On this note, it welcomed the readiness of a number of AU partners to extend their support to the African countries willing to assist the Government of the Comoros in restoring its authority in Anjouan.

9. Pursuant to the agreement reached at the meeting, a military planning team comprising experts from Tanzania, the Sudan, Senegal and Libya visited the Comoros from 25 February to 5 March 2008 to put finishing touches to the plan for military intervention in Anjouan, in consultation with the relevant Comorian authorities. The team held several working visits with senior officials of the Comorian Defense Ministry and the National Army for Development (AND). Thereafter, the team proceeded to Dar-es-Salaam to conclude its work.

10. On 8 March 2008, the Ministers and other representatives of the four countries mentioned earlier on, as well as those of the Comoros, met in Dar-es-Salaam under the chairmanship of the Tanzanian Foreign Minister. The meeting approved the report of the team of military and security experts, including the team's recommendations on the practical measures needed to assist the Government of the Comoros in re-establishing its authority in Anjouan. The meeting further emphasized that any attempt on the part of the illegal authorities in Anjouan to resist the military intervention in the Island would be regarded as a criminal act and would be dealt with as such.

11. On the following day, the 9 March 2008, the Ministers and the other representatives of the African coalition proceeded to Moroni to update the Comorian President on the outcomes of the Dar-es-Salaam meeting. The delegation took the opportunity to re-affirm its unwavering support for the efforts deployed by the Government of the Union of the Comoros to restore State authority in Anjouan and preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country. It appealed to Colonel Bacar to surrender unconditionally and to do nothing to oppose the Comorian army backed by the coalition.

12. The meeting of the Ministerial Committee of the countries of the region on the Comoros held in Addis Ababa on 28 January and 1 February 2008, on the sidelines of the 12th Ordinary Session of the AU Executive Council, agreed on the principle of fielding an AU-led high-level international mission to Anjouan led by the AU and including representatives of the United States of America and France. The objective was to convince the illegal authorities of Anjouan to conform to the framework for resolving the crisis in Anjouan as spelt out by relevant decisions of Council.

13. It was in this spirit, and in a last attempt, that an international mission comprising the Head of the AU Liaison Office in Moroni, the French Ambassador in the Comoros, the Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Madagascar and a representative of the League of Arab States embarked on a visit to Anjouan on 27 February 2008 to meet with Colonel Bacar with a view to finding a peaceful exit from the crisis and avoid the use of force. The mission, however, came up against the intransigence of Colonel Bacar who rejected in their totality the proposals put forward by the AU and the representatives of the international community, particularly the recommendations pertaining to the holding of free, fair and transparent elections to elect a new President for the Island under conditions defined by the AU, on the understanding that Colonel Bacar may run in such an election or opt to go into exile. On return to Moroni on the same day, the delegation was immediately received in audience by the Head of State of the Comoros to whom it gave an account of the outcomes of its visit to Anjouan.

14. Meanwhile, the 111th meeting of Council held on 18 February 2008 decided to extend, for another two (2) months, the measures imposed on the illegal authorities of Anjouan as stipulated in paragraph 5 of Communiqué PSC/PR/Comm (XCV) adopted at its 95th meeting held on 10 October 2007, as well as the mandate of MAES. It is noteworthy that, in its afore-mentioned decision, the 10th Ordinary Session of the Assembly expressed its appreciation for the work accomplished by MAES and appealed to Member States to provide the necessary assistance towards strengthening the Mission, thereby enabling it to discharge its mandate effectively.

III. “OPERATION DEMOCRACY IN THE COMOROS” AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

15. In execution of the military intervention plan agreed at the Dar-es-Salaam meeting, the Tanzanian troops to participate in the operation in Anjouan started to arrive on 11 March 2008, and were joined soon after by Sudanese troops. France provided logistical support for the operation, transporting the Tanzanian troops and their hardware. Libya, for its part, provided transport for the Sudanese troops, as well as assistance in the form of equipment to the AND. Ahead of the military intervention, the coalition troops, with a total strength of slightly over 1,500, were assembled in the Island of Mohéli, which is the closest to Anjouan, as from early February for Comorian troops, and 13 March 2008 for Tanzanian and Sudanese troops.

16. Prior to the intervention *per se*, the Comorian forces successfully mounted two separate incursions into Anjouan. This enabled them to obtain first-hand information useful for the conduct of the then imminent intervention. During those incursions, several elements of the Anjouanese Gendarmerie were taken prisoner.

17. In a statement made on the eve of the intervention, the President of the Comoros announced that he had given orders to the AND, assisted by Tanzanian and Sudanese troops, to intervene in Anjouan with a view to putting an end to the rebellion. He further made a commitment that, once the rebellion has been squashed, he would do his

utmost, with the assistance of the international community, to ensure that the ensuing transitional period in Anjouan is successfully managed in strict compliance with the country's Constitution and in a way that would enable the population of Anjouan to elect the chief executive of the Island through free and democratic elections. The President of the Comoros paid tribute to the AU, Tanzania, Libya, the Sudan and Senegal for their military, logistical and financial support. He also expressed gratitude to the United States of America and France for their engagement in the endeavour to re-establish State authority in Anjouan.

18. The intervention in Anjouan took place in the early hours of 25 March. In just a few hours, the AND, with the support of allied troops from Tanzania and the Sudan, took control of key strategic areas in the Island. Comorian forces took the airport. Tanzanian forces seized the port and Mutsமுdu – the Island's capital, while Sudanese troops landed at Domoni, west of the Island. By the following day, the Island had come under the full control of the coalition forces which suffered not a single loss. This intervention was received with jubilation, not only in Anjouan, where the population fraternized with the coalition forces, but also in the rest of the Archipelago.

19. It should, however, be mentioned that the absence of adequate cover for the Anjouanese coastal areas made it possible for Colonel Bacar to flee aboard a traditional small boat known as *Kwassa-Kwassa* to Mayotte, accompanied by 22 of his closest collaborators. In the evening of 27 March 2008, these fugitives were transferred to the Island of La Reunion for reasons of public order and security. They made a request for asylum and France, in accordance with its international obligations, granted them the right to remain on the French territory pending a decision on their request by competent French authorities.

20. At its 28 March 2008 meeting, the PSC expressed satisfaction that the Comorian forces, with the support of the coalition, succeeded in re-establishing the authority of the Union of the Comoros in the Island of Anjouan, thus putting an end to the illegal regime of Colonel Bacar which had persistently rejected all crisis exit proposals. For my part, I sent letters to the Presidents of Tanzania, the Sudan and Senegal, as well as to the Libyan Leader, expressing to them the gratitude of the AU for having, in pursuance of the decision of the Assembly, responded positively to the appeal for assistance made by the Comorian Government. In a Communiqué published on 27 March 2008, the Government of the United States of America paid tribute to the AU for its support, which paved the way for the restoration of the authority of the Government of the Union of the Comoros in the Island of Anjouan.

21. On 31 March 2008, the authorities of the Union officially inaugurated the interim Chief Executive of the Island in the person of Laiiizamane Abdou Cheikh, with responsibility to deal with day-to-day issues and organize elections to be held in May 2008 to choose a new President for Anjouan. The Comorian authorities made a commitment to abide by the texts governing the organization and conduct of elections. However, the political class remained divided over the modalities of conducting the presidential elections in Anjouan. Some held the view that there should be a re-run of

the entire electoral process in Anjouan which, they argued, had been invalidated right from the onset by the acts of intimidation perpetrated by Mohamed Bacar and his gendarmerie, to enable all those that so wish to present their candidatures. Others, who advocated the need for a speedy return to legality, argued that it was necessary to pick up the electoral process from the point at which it was interrupted.

22. On 5 April, the Head of State of the Comoros paid a visit lasting several days to Anjouan. On that occasion, the President, among other things, appealed to the people of Anjouan and, in general, the people of the Comoros, to definitively bury separatism as advocated by Colonel Bacar, and called for his immediate extradition to the Comoros to face justice.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

23. After more than 10 years of sustained efforts, the authority of the Union has at last been re-established in Anjouan. This represents a crucial turning point in the annals of the Comoros and deserves the commendations of all. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to President Sambi for his determination and to express my heart-felt gratitude to Tanzania, the Sudan, Libya and Senegal for having extended the requisite assistance to the Government of the Union of the Comoros, pursuant to the decision of the Assembly. I would also like, once more, to express my gratitude to the countries of the region which, under the leadership of South Africa, have left no stone unturned over the past years in providing assistance to the Comoros and in supporting the reconciliation efforts there.

24. With the overthrow of the illegal regime of Colonel Bacar, it is now needful to provide assistance to the Comorian Government towards the organization of elections to choose a new President for Anjouan. Over and above elections, there is the need to focus on resolving the problem of the sharing of constitutional competences, strengthen good governance and the existing institutional arrangements to facilitate the effective functioning of the Comorian Entity. Sustained attention should also be accorded to the socio-economic development of the Archipelago and to reducing poverty which has provided a nurturing ground for separatism.

25. In a letter that he addressed to me on 7 April, President Sambi, after reiterating his profound gratitude to the AU for its determination in accompanying the Comoros in combating separatism, emphasized that the hopes generated by the restoration of State authority in Anjouan “cannot be sustained for long without consideration of and a solution to the very many problems facing this Island”, the population of which is, statistically, the poorest in the Archipelago. He further indicated that his Government planned to launch a huge rescue package for the Island’s socio-economic recovery. President Sambi made a solemn appeal to the international community at large to support, with similar determination, the reconstruction efforts to be deployed in Anjouan to help pull the population out of misery and poverty.

26. In light of the above, I recommend that Council extend the mandate of MAES for additional six (6) months, during which the Mission would assist the Comorian forces in ensuring the security of the elections in Anjouan. MAES would also devote attention to boosting security in Anjouan through, in particular, conclusion of the weapons collection operation and integration of elements of the Anjouanese Gendarmerie into the AND. The Tanzanian and Sudanese contingents would form a major component of the Mission. However, it would be necessary to deploy police officers to help the Mission accomplish its mandate. On this score, the Commission would contact Member States to raise the required police force as soon as Council approves my proposals.

27. Apart from security issues, it would be necessary to provide assistance to the Comoros in the field of governance and socio-economic development. It is envisaged, in this regard, to endow MAES with a robust civilian component to coordinate support to the Comorian Government in the areas earlier indicated. Similarly, it is planned to field, as speedily as possible, a mission of the AU Commission to the Comoros. The mission would also involve relevant AU partners institutions, especially the League of Arab States, the European Union, the United Nations and the Francophonie, for more incisive joint assessment of needs and more effective coordination of the measures undertaken by all stakeholders.

28. As agreed when Council initially authorized the deployment of MAES, the troop contributing countries are expected to meet the expenses related to the deployment of the operation. At the same time, however, the Commission will endeavour to mobilize resources, in particular within the framework of the Africa Peace Facility; consultations have already been initiated with the European Union in this direction.

29. I wish to commend the Comorian authorities for their commitment to leave nothing undone to ensure that fresh elections are organized in Anjouan within the shortest possible timeframe, and for their commitment to scrupulously respect the texts governing the functioning of the Union. I urge all Comorians to consolidate the national unity and territorial integrity of the country and to do all in their power to tackle the challenges of economic and social development in the country. At this critical juncture in the history of the Comoros, I call on all AU Member States and the international community at large to provide all necessary assistance to consolidate peace, stability and reconciliation in the Comoros.

2008

Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Situation in the Comoros Since the 10th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union Held in Addis Ababa From 31 January to 2 February 2008

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