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PRESS RELEASE

THE AU COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY AND REPRESENTATIVES OF AMISOM TROOP CONTRIBUTING COUNTRIES COMPLETE A VISIT TO MOGADISHU

Addis Ababa, 8 January 2015: The Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union (AU) Commission, Ambassador Smail Chergui, accompanied by representatives of the troop contributing countries (TCCs) to the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), undertook yesterday a visit to Mogadishu. During the visit, the Commissioner and the delegation met with the President of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and other senior FGS officials, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense. They also met with the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and Head of AMISOM, Maman Sidikou, and the Mission's military and police commanders, as well as with the Special Representative of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), Nicholas Kay. The visit took place in the aftermath of the attack carried out by the Al-Shabaab terrorist group against the AMISOM Halane Base Camp, at the Mogadishu International Airport, on 25 December 2014, which resulted in the death of a number of military and civilian personnel, while several others were wounded.

The Commissioner for Peace and Security seized the opportunity of the meeting with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to reiterate, on behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the AU's continued commitment to support the Somali leaders and people as they work to fulfill their aspiration to peace, security and reconciliation, and complete the long and arduous journey towards their nation's rebirth. He added that the deployment of AMISOM and the huge sacrifices made in the pursuit of the Mission's mandate were a practical expression of the principle of pan-African solidarity and of the continent's determination to fully assume its responsibilities in the search for a lasting solution to the daunting challenges that continue to confront Somalia. He paid tribute to President Sheikh Mohamud for his leadership, and encouraged him and the other Somali stakeholders not to relent in their efforts, building on the huge progress made thus far.

On his part, President Sheikh Mohamud reiterated the gratitude of his Government and the people of Somalia to the AU for its continued support to Somalia, notably through the critical role being played on the ground by AMISOM, as demonstrated by the success of the recent *Operations Eagle and Indian*, carried out jointly with the Somali National Army (SNA), and which made it possible to recover several strategic areas from the Al-Shabaab terrorist group. He emphasized his Government's determination to stabilize the liberated areas and build effective Somali defense and security forces that will be able to assume the security of Somalia and take over from AMISOM. In this respect, he renewed his appeal to the international community to provide greater support to the efforts being deployed by the Somali authorities. President Sheikh Mohamud also renewed his condolences to the AU Commission for the losses sustained by AMISOM following the 25 December 2014 terrorist attack against the Mission's Base Camp.

Issues relating to the investigation into the 25 December attack, as well as other aspects of AMISOM presence in Somalia and its operations, including the finalization of the new Status of Mission Agreement (SOMA), were also discussed during the meeting between President Sheikh Mohamud and Commissioner Chergui. As required, concrete steps were agreed upon in terms of follow-up.

While at the AMISOM Base Camp, Commissioner Chergui and the TCCs' representatives visited the scene of the 25 December attack. They were briefed on the circumstances under which this criminal act took place and on the ongoing efforts to improve security and safety at the Camp. The Commissioner expressed the expectation that the AMISOM-UN-FGS Retreat taking place in Kampala, Uganda, from 7 to 10 January 2015, will identify, and agree on, additional steps to facilitate the discharge by the Mission of the mandate entrusted to it by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the UN Security Council. The Commissioner echoed the AU's deep sympathy with the families and Governments of the personnel killed during the 25 December attack, as expressed by the Chairperson of the Commission, and her best wishes for speedy recovery for those wounded.

Addressing the military and police commanders of AMISOM gathered on the occasion, Commissioner Chergui stated: *"It gives me pride to be here with you today. It is a moment that generates hope and sadness in me. I have hope because your resilience has demonstrated that we shall overcome the challenge to bring peace, security and stability to Somalia. The results on the ground speak for themselves. I am saddened because every life and limb lost in the pursuit of this noble cause is already one too many. I, however, also realize that it is with this readiness to make the supreme sacrifice that we have been able to degrade and defeat the enemy"*. He added: *"Let me conclude by, once again, thanking you for your selfless sacrifice in the service for peace in Somalia. I assure you your efforts are not in vain. One day, you will be proud to look back and appreciate the fruits of your labour in a peaceful, secure and vibrant Somalia. Keep up the spirit. Victory is certain!"*.

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