



JOINT PRESS RELEASE:

African Union, Kofi Annan Foundation, and ICTJ Convene High-Level Discussion in Addis Ababa on Truth Commissions and Peace Processes

ADDIS ABABA, April 18, 2016—Today, the African Union, in partnership with the Kofi Annan Foundation and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), opened a high-level conference at the AU Commission headquarters in Addis Ababa on the critical issues that peace mediators and practitioners face when considering the option of including an official truth commission as part of a peace process.

The two-day conference, held under the theme “Truth Commissions and Peace Processes in Africa,” has gathered senior staff from the African Union and member states, representatives from Truth Commissions in Africa, as well as international and national experts to reflect on lessons learned from truth commissions that have emerged from peace processes in Africa and other continents. Relevant countries under discussion are Tunisia, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Mali, Kenya, Cote d’Ivoire, and Colombia.

Opening Statements were delivered by Amb. Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union; Mr. David Tolbert, President of ICTJ and the conference’s keynote speech was delivered this morning by Mr. Kofi Annan, Chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation and former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

“This high-level conference comes at a right moment for the African Union. Indeed, as we meet here today, we are actively working towards the establishment of a Truth Commission for the Republic of South Sudan and are supporting the Ministry of National Reconciliation in Mali with the establishment of a Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission for that country. Furthermore, you may be aware that the African Union is currently working on a Transitional Justice Framework which is being finalized for adoption by our Member States”, said Amb. Chergui.

“We must first acknowledge that peace cannot be founded upon a willed amnesia about the past nor a renunciation of accountability,” said Mr. Tolbert. “On the other hand, for this search to be meaningful, it cannot be a mechanistic response or yielding to an external imposition, but rather the result of a deep comprehension of the reasons for truth and truth seeking.” “From my own experience, I can say that we have learnt that justice is not an

impediment to peace – it is an essential partner. Of course, the parallel pursuit of justice and peace does present testing challenges for peacemakers,” said Mr. Annan. “My advice is that we must be ambitious enough to pursue both justice and peace, and wise enough to know when and how to do so.”

Kofi Annan added: “Truth seeking should help determine the accountability of individuals. But truth seeking is not only about individual responsibility; it’s also about society, about the state and its institutions. This is the truth that is needed for making changes to the system, learning from past failures so as to prevent future ones. Nevertheless, I would caution that truth seeking cannot substitute for criminal justice. Both are essential building blocks in the reformation of the state and the healing of societies riven by brutality. The work of a truth commission can allow a society to move forward based on a shared understanding of the past and a common vision for the future.”

Central to these discussions is a report by ICTJ and the Kofi Annan Foundation, titled “[Challenging the Conventional: Can Truth Commissions Strengthen Peace Processes?](#),” which explores many of the common assumptions about why truth commissions are created after armed conflict to address past abuses and what factors make them more likely to succeed – or fail.

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Conference Twitter hash tag: #truth4peace

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Peace and Security

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