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**Statement: Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union
Commemorating International Human Rights Day
10 December 2023**

International Human Rights Day is observed by the international community every year on 10 December. This year's celebration, themed *Dignity, Freedom, and Justice for All*, marks 75 years since the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and today's commemoration is particularly significant. It not only coincides with the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, but I am happy to note that this year, on 28 November, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) signed the much-anticipated Joint AU-UN Framework on Human Rights.

The signing of the Joint Framework on Human Rights represents a major achievement on the part of the UN and AU, since the first AU-UN High Level Dialogue on Human Rights held in Addis Ababa on 24 April 2018. The Joint Framework, based on consensus, reflects the UN and AU's shared values, and seeks to address current challenges impeding the realization of Agenda 2063, 'the Africa we want', and Agenda 2030 for the implementation of the global Sustainable Development Goals. The Joint Framework also ensures that the triple nexus of peace and security, development, and human rights has now moved from aspiration to operationalization.

Furthermore, and through a project based on a tripartite agreement between the AU, the European Union, and the UN, signed on 29 December 2021, the AU has continued enhancing its Compliance and Accountability Frameworks for Peace Support Operations (PSOs). The Project provides a platform for increased dialogue on concrete responses to issues and concerns related to human rights, peace, and security. It also presents the AU with an opportunity to assess its capacity to anchor human rights at the heart of its peace and security programming, while contributing to the strengthening of accountability mechanisms within AU PSOs, as well as the national judicial systems of troop and police contributing countries.

Much has been achieved in the 75 years since the adoption of the UDHR. However, and as recognized in UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' "New Agenda for Peace" policy brief (20 July 2023), the changing nature of armed conflict in Africa, and indeed across the world – characterized by increased fragmentation and the proliferation of non-State armed groups, with increased violence against civilians – continues to pose serious challenges for both the UN and the AU. Many people, especially children, women, and persons with disabilities, who are disproportionately affected by conflict, are still not enjoying the ideals upheld and the rights proclaimed in the UDHR. Indeed, despite the efforts and the progress made to address and prevent violence against women and girls, the prevalence of such violence remains high in Africa and worldwide. We should renew our commitment to make the full, equal, and



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meaningful participation of women and girls, and the protection of women and girls from all forms of violence, a non-negotiable political priority that is accompanied by deliberate and tangible actions.

On this International Human Rights Day, let us therefore be reminded of our shared commitment to ensure that gains in democracy, governance, respect for the rule of law, conflict prevention, peace building and the protection and promotion of international human rights are not eroded. As the UN Secretary-General has aptly noted, and I quote:

"Perhaps the best prevention tool we have is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and the treaties derived from it. The rights set out in it identify many of the root causes of conflict, but equally they provide real world solutions through real change on the ground." *Human Rights Council, 27 February 2017*

Since human rights violations portend clear early warning signals for future conflicts, there is a need to prioritize the strengthening of capacity and expertise for human rights' promotion and protection as a strategic way of preventing conflict. Where conflict already exists, human rights promotion and protection is essential to mitigate the depth and scope of the impact. National, regional, and continental early warning mechanisms that take note of and advocate for the redress of human rights grievances, building on the principles of the UDHR, are therefore key in the prevention of conflict.

This year's theme - *Dignity, Freedom, and Justice for All* - reminds us that ensuring human rights for all, requires the participation of all. 75 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, let us together live up to the ideals of the Declaration.