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Statement

as delivered by

**Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh, Chief of Staff,
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at the

**Open Session of the African Union Peace and Security Council
on the Principles of Protection of Civilians in Conflict Areas
in Africa**

Addis Ababa
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Madame Chairperson,

The Protection of Civilians in conflict areas is a fundamental principle for the United Nations and the African Union, underpinned by the founding documents of the two Organizations, the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitutive Act of the African Union. In the Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, the two Organizations “acknowledge that the protection of civilians, the promotion of human rights standards, and the prevention of human rights violations, as well as the respect for international humanitarian law, are fundamental principles of any peace and security effort.” These are important shared values and principles, which bind our Organizations together.

We therefore welcome the decision of the Peace and Security Council to convene a meeting on this issue. Today, the United Nations Security Council is also holding a **ministerial-level open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict** and the Secretary-General will present a report on the issue. We welcome the increased focus and attention on this issue which, given shifting trends in global violent conflict, requires our urgent attention at the highest level.

In an open debate held on 25 May 2017, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of the protection of civilians in conflict by ensuring “greater respect for

international humanitarian and human rights law”; protecting health care personnel and facilities in armed conflict; and “preventing forced displacement and finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people”.

Madame Chairperson,

The African Union has taken significant steps to strengthen the Protection of Civilians (PoC) in conflict areas in Africa:

1. In 2010, the AU produced a comprehensive **Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in African Union Peace Support Operations** which adopted a 4-tiered approach that is the cornerstone of the PoC policy. In addition, in 2015, the AU adopted the **Aide-Mémoire for the consideration of issues pertaining to the Protection of Civilians in Africa**, and the **Integrated PoC Training Standards**. It is essential to formalize and mainstream these instruments and mechanisms.
2. The AU also made considerable progress with regards to the development of a human rights and conduct and discipline **compliance framework for its peace support operations, as outlined in Security Council resolution 2320 (2016)**. This needs to be highlighted and strengthened to advance the implementation of the AU-UN partnership in peace and security.

Contemporary conflicts have made civilians, more than ever, the victims of appalling violence. To protect them, there is an urgent need to enhance respect for International Humanitarian Law and human rights law. It is imperative for the United Nations, the African Union, the RECs/RMs, African Member States and other partners to use their leverage and influence on parties in armed conflict to protect civilians. States should also engage constructively in the process to strengthen compliance with International Humanitarian Law and human rights law. **Accountability** for serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and human rights law is vital. Where parties to conflict persist in seriously violating International Humanitarian Law, the **international community should take decisive action to ensure accountability, including in PSOs.**

While welcoming the invaluable contributions of African TCCs/PCCs, we also call for the endorsement of the **Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in Peacekeeping Operations.**

3. With regard to the **implementation of protection of civilians' mandates in AU PSOs**, notable challenges persist. Some of these are related to the **high-risk and logistically challenging environments** in which AU peacekeepers operate. The protection of civilians requires a multidimensional approach with a **combination of policing, civilian and military expertise**. It is critical for AU PSOs to be

appropriately equipped and resourced to undertake the full range of PoC responsibilities.

Madame Chairperson,

We welcome the continued commitment of the African Union to the Protection of Civilians in Conflict. As a strategic partner of the African Union, the UN will continue to support this agenda, in close collaboration with AU Member States and other partners.

Finally,

The UN remains committed to supporting the AU in strengthening its human rights, conduct and discipline; compliance framework and mechanisms for AU Peace Support Operations (AU PSOs). There has been an extensive body of work undertaken in the past two to three years and this will continue to inform the strength of our policies and practice going forward. This is one of the key areas of cooperation between the AU and the UN in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the development of the capacity of the Somali national army.

Thank you