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Capacity Building on CBRN Risk Mitigation within the Framework of UNSCR 1540 (2004), in Collaboration with AFCONE and EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative

Statement by

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Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department**

Distinguished Delegates from Member States

Colleagues from CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance Programme

Participant from the UN Family

Colleagues from the Commission and other AU Entities

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, I wish to welcome you to the African Union Headquarters here in Addis Ababa, and to this you this first joint event between the European Union chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), and the African Union Commission, on the theme “Working Together for more Safety and Security”.

This meeting is a great opportunity for us to not only exchange views and share experiences on the critical subject of CBRN risk mitigation, but also to identify ways to jointly move forward together through enhanced cooperation as we work towards a safer and more secure Africa as contained in the AU’s Agenda 2063.

I wish to specifically thank the EU Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative and UNICRI to paring with the AU in this holding this meeting. Not least, I thank the EU for funding this global network which we see as addressing a transnational threat.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The African Continent remains seized of matters of CBRN, which dates back to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). We take pride in noting that the very First Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU that was held in 1964 adopted a Declaration on the Denuclearization of Africa. It is in pursuance of this decision that the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba) was adopted in 1996.

In the same spirit, the OAU, at the 28th Ordinary Session held in 2002, adopted a decision supporting the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and calling for its universality and implementation.

The Commission supports Member States in the implementation of the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BWC), which is seen as critical, especially in light of the increasing threat posed by contagious pathogens in the continent and globally.

The Commission is also supporting Member States in implementing UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004), which aims to prevent the acquisition of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons by terrorist groups. I am glad that the Officer responsible for this portfolio at the UN Office to the African Union is present here, and look forward to proposal towards concrete areas of enhanced cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen

There are currently 28 AU Member States that are party to the Centres of Excellence initiative, and are benefiting from the various programs under this initiative, for which the Commission is grateful. However, you will agree with me that, within the framework of the Common African Defence and Security Policy of 2004, the weakest link in the chain of the 55 AU Member States is contributes a major security threat to the Continent. It is therefore important that our partners seriously consider contributing to minimizing this threat by increasing the beneficiary countries of this noble initiative.

Allow to me observe that the multilateral instruments on CBRN prohibit associated weapons, but also allow their use for peaceful purposes. However, AU Member States are struggling with competing priorities because of the various security threats they face. Consequently they are challenged in developing and utilizing technical expertise and technologies in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear sciences and technologies so that they can benefit from their peaceful application. It is my hope that initiatives like this one will contribute to not only raising awareness about CBRN risks but also contribute to identifying weakness faced and opportunities for cooperation to address the risks faced.

In this regard, it is my hope that we shall clearly identify the enhanced role of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in supporting Member States to meet their obligations under the various multilateral and continental instruments on mitigating CBRN risks, including in capacity-building.

In conclusion, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to assure you of the commitment of the African Union Commission in working with EU Centre of Excellence Initiative, UNICRI and other relevant partners in supporting AU Member States to minimize the risks posed by CBRN materials, and in developing capacities to harvest their technologies for peaceful and developmental purposes.

I look forward to an engaging two days that will come up with concrete and actionable conclusions.

Thank you for your kind attention