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PRESS STATEMENT

The Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), Mr. Jean Ping, follows with grave concern developments in the Republic of Guinea, after the announcement of the death of President Lansana Conté.

In this regard, the Chairperson of the Commission strongly condemns the announcement of the seizure of power in that country by elements of the Guinean armed forces and their subsequent decision to suspend the Constitution and various institutions of Guinea. This seizure of power constitutes a flagrant violation of the Guinean Constitution, which, in such an instance, provides that the Speaker of the National Assembly assumes the interim. It constitutes also a violation of the Lome Declaration of July 2000, the Constitutive Act of the AU and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

The Chairperson of the Commission urges all Guinean stakeholders to work within the framework of legality, in a spirit of consensus and in the higher interests of Guinea, in order to ensure a smooth transition that will allow their country to meet the many challenges, both political and socio-economic, facing it.

In accordance with the provisions of the Lome Declaration, the Chairperson of the Commission has taken the necessary steps for the speedy holding of a meeting of the Peace and Security Council to examine the situation.

Similarly, the Chairperson of the Commission has initiated consultations with ECOWAS and the countries of the region to discuss with them the modalities of coordinated efforts in dealing with the situation and assisting Guinea overcome, in a legal and consensual manner, the crisis occasioned by the seizure of power by elements of the army, to maintain peace and security and allow the country to meet its various challenges, whose resolution is a precondition for the long-term stability and consolidation of the democratic process in that country.

Upon receiving the news of the death of President Conté, the Chairperson of the Commission addressed, this morning, a message of sympathy to the Speaker of the National Assembly, expressing to him and to the people and Government of Guinea, the sincerest condolence of the AU. In this message, the Chairperson of the Commission equally urged all stakeholders in Guinea to work together to ensure that the succession to President Conte is organized in peace and serenity, and in strict accordance with the Constitution of Guinea.

Addis Ababa, on 23 December 2008