



PRESS STATEMENT

The AU High-Level Panel on Darfur concludes its inaugural meeting in Addis Ababa

The AU High-Level Panel on Darfur (AUPD) concluded its inaugural meeting today, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the chairmanship of former President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa. In addition to President Mbeki, the other members of the AUPD are: General Abdulsalami Abubakar (Nigeria), former Head of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; former President Pierre Buyoya of Burundi; Rakiya Abdillahi Omaar (Somalia), Director, African Rights; Mr. Tiéblé Dramé (Mali), former Minister; Mr. Alhaji Kabir A. Mohammed (Nigeria), former State House Counsel and Special Envoy of former President Olusegun Obasanjo on the Trial of suspects of war crimes and human rights violations in Darfur; Hon. Judge Florence Ndepele Mwachande Mumba (Zambia), Judge of the Supreme Court and former vice-President of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; and Mr. Ahmed Maher El Sayed, former Foreign Minister of Egypt. The AUPD is supported by a team of experts.

The AUPD was established as an independent organ by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 142nd meeting held in Addis Ababa, on 21 July 2008, with the mandate to examine the situation in Darfur in depth and to submit recommendations on how best the issues of accountability and combating impunity, on the one hand, peace, healing and reconciliation, on the other, could be effectively and comprehensively addressed. This decision was taken following the application by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for an arrest warrant to be issued against President Omar Hassan Al Bashir of Sudan. At the same time, the PSC requested the United Nations (UN) Security Council, in accordance with the provisions of Article 16 of the Rome Statute of the ICC, to defer the process initiated by the ICC, taking into account the need to ensure that the ongoing peace efforts are not jeopardized, as well as the fact that, in the current circumstances, a prosecution may not be in the interest of the victims and justice.

The inaugural meeting of the AUPD opened yesterday, with a ceremony conducted in the presence of representatives of the PSC, other representatives of the Diplomatic Corps in Addis Ababa, including the Deans, the Permanent members and African members of the UN Security Council, and the European Union (EU). The opening ceremony was marked by statements by Commissioner Elizabeth Tankeu, on behalf of Chairperson Jean Ping, and by former President Thabo Mbeki. The meeting continued over two days with the Panel members, the team of experts, the UNAMID staff and other resource persons.

The meeting made it possible for the members of the AUPD to deepen their understanding of the various aspects of the situation in Darfur. In this respect, the meeting featured presentations on the origins and patterns of war in that region; the search for peace, with the Abuja peace talks and subsequent efforts by the AU/UN Joint Chief Mediator to restart the political talks and achieve an all-inclusive comprehensive peace agreement; the UNAMID activities, its achievements to-date and the challenges being encountered; the Sudan's national political process; and the competing visions on the Darfur crisis and how these have shaped the international agenda for action.

The AUPD considered its work programme, including the type and extent of research it will pursue, the actors with whom it will consult and other consultations it will undertake in pursuance of its mandate. The AUPD members will travel to the Sudan, including Darfur, and to other countries to meet with other stakeholders.

The AUPD is expected to complete its assignment within four (4) months from the day of its inaugural meeting, and submit its final report to the Chairperson of the Commission and, through him, to the PSC.

It should be recalled that the AU is involved in the efforts to resolve the Darfur crisis since 2004, both through the deployment of a peacekeeping operation and the mediation of the political talks. Following the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1769(2007) authorizing the deployment of the Hybrid AU/UN Operation (UNAMID), UNAMID took over the peacekeeping mission. Regarding the political process, it should be noted that, in July 2008, Djibrill Yipèné Bassolé, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, was appointed as the AU-UN Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur. He has since undertaken extensive consultations with the Sudanese stakeholders with a view of restarting the political talks.

Addis Ababa, 19 March 2009