

AU deputy Chair person

Your Excellency, Ato Haile Mariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Your Excellency, the Executive Secretary of IGAD

Your Excellency, Amb. Seyoum Mesfin, Chair of the IGAD Special Envoys for South Sudan,

Distinguished Members of the IGAD Mediation Team,

Dear Brothers and Sisters from South Sudan,

Special Envoys for South Sudan,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, I have the honour to make this brief remark welcoming our Brothers and Sisters from South Sudan to the opening of the second round of their political negotiations.

Your return to Addis Ababa for the resumption of the talks is good news and welcomed by all of us.

I am encouraged to note that both parties are making diligent efforts to fulfill the commitments they entered into following the signing of the two agreements – on cessation of hostilities and the status of the detainees – here in Addis Ababa on 23 January 2014.

As we are gathered here, the deployment of the members of the Monitoring and Verification teams are about to commence. It is our hope that stopping the fighting would create the necessary conditions for securing free and unhindered access for the necessary humanitarian assistance to thousands who are in need, particularly the displaced women, children and elderly living in very precarious conditions.

I also wish to welcome the <sup>release of the</sup> seven detainees ~~who are with us on this important occasion. I have no doubts~~ that their presence in the political talks will greatly facilitate the search for a consensual, peaceful and lasting solution to the current crisis.

It is my hope that the process required for the release of the remaining four will be expedited so as to allow them to join their brothers and sisters in these talks.

And no doubt

**Excellences,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The tasks of finding a consensual and comprehensive solution to the underlying factors that have affected the security, stability and development of this young nation would not be easy.

At the same time, I firmly believe that the opportunity, will and responsibility for finding such a solution are here today and in the hands of South Sudanese who accepted to return to Addis Ababa for the political talks.

But it is also our collective responsibility – as IGAD, the AU and the wider international community – to do all we can to accompany the people of South Sudan to achieve a long-term and durable peace and focus their attention towards reconciliation and nation building.

South Sudan has many friends in and outside the continent. Let us all join our hands in support of our South Sudanese brothers and sisters to help them agree on what will heal and reunite them, rather than divide them.

The AU has been partnering with IGAD and will continue to provide the necessary assistance in the commencement of this broad and inclusive dialogue as well as expediting the deployment of ceasefire observers.

We are following the developments in South Sudan very closely. The Chairperson travelled to Juba in January and consulted with President Salva Kiir and the detainees. On my part, I met with Mr. Riek Machar this past week. In our meetings, we impressed upon all the parties the imperative and urgency of providing the necessary leadership in placing the interest of their young country above narrow political considerations.

Meanwhile, the AU Commission is working towards the early establishment of the Commission of Inquiry as mandated by the summit of the Peace and Security Council that met in Banjul, The Gambia, on 30 December 2013. We are encouraged that both parties have committed to work with the AU on this important matter.

In conclusion, I truly hope that these talks will be successful in reaching a consensus on the comprehensive resolution of all underlying and outstanding political issues.

We look forward to the celebration, very soon, of their conclusions.

I thank you.