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PRESS RELEASE

AU Special Envoy for Western Sahara Concludes his Mission to the UN Secretariat and Briefs the UN Security Council on Western Sahara

Addis Ababa, 1 May 2016: Within the framework of his mandate, the AU Special Envoy for Western Sahara, **H.E. former President Joaquim Chissano**, undertook a mission to the UN Secretariat in New York, from 26 to 29 April 2016. The mission was in implementation of the AU Organ's decisions on the situation in Western Sahara, notably the decision adopted at the 588th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), held on 6 April 2016, at which, Council requested the Chairperson of the Commission to pursue and intensify her efforts, including through her Special Envoy, towards effective follow-up of the relevant provisions of its decisions.

During his mission, the AU Special Envoy held consultations with the UN high level officials, **Ambassador Christopher Ross**, UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara; **Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun**, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; **Mr. Edmond Mulet**, Chef de Cabinet to the UN Secretary-General. The AU Special Envoy's delegation also met with various representatives of the Permanent Missions to the UN namely, **Ambassador Liu Jieyi** of China, President of the UN Security Council for the month of April; **Ambassador Rafael Dario Ramirez Carreno**, Permanent Representative of Venezuela; **Ambassador Vitaly I. Churkin**, Permanent Representative of Russian Federation to the UN; the Delegation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR); **Ambassador Gerard Jacobus Van Bohemen**, Permanent Representative of New Zealand; **Ambassador Michele Sison**, U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN; **Ambassador Sabri Boukadoum**, Permanent Representative of Algeria to the UN; **Ambassador Elbio Rosselli**, Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the UN; **Ambassador François Delattre**, Permanent Representative of France to the UN; **Ambassador Román Oyarzun Marchesi**, Permanent Representative of Spain to the UN. The AU Special Envoy delegation also held in-depth consultations with the Permanent Representative of Angola, **Ambassador Ismael A. Gaspar Martins**, in its capacity as the member of A3.

The AU Special Envoy also briefed the UN Security Council during the Arria-formula Meeting on Western Sahara, which was jointly organised by the Permanent Missions of Angola and Venezuela, on 26 April 2016.

The consultations and the briefing provided an opportunity to exchange frank and open views on the situation in Western Sahara and the efforts being deployed towards resolution of the conflict. The AU Special Envoy expressed to his interlocutors the deep concern of the AU about the prolonged suffering of people of Western Sahara and the lack of progress towards the early resolution of the conflict in the territory on the basis of the international legality.

In this regard, he commended the timely and bold visit of the UN Secretary-General undertaken to Western Sahara and the region, from 3 to 7 March 2016, and the serious resolve the UNSG showed to end the Conflict in the Territory. In the same vein, Former President Chissano deplored the actions taken by the Moroccan authorities of not receiving the UNSG in Rabat and also preventing him from visiting MINURSO Headquarters in Layoune, capital City of the occupied Western Sahara, as well as their unilateral decision of expelling the civilian Component of the MINURSO.

Former President Chissano stressed the need to change the *status quo* of the current negotiation framework to serious negotiations without preconditions and in good faith to reach a just and durable solution to the conflict. He further stressed Africa's moral and political responsibility to contribute to the solution to conflicts in the continent and underlined the need for Africa's leading role and guidance for the international efforts regarding the conflict in Western Sahara.

The AU Special Envoy recalled the urgent need to give the people of Western Sahara the opportunity of choosing freely their destiny through the exercise of their legitimate right to self-determination, and called on the UN Security Council to facilitate this process by establishing a timetable for the referendum on self-determination.

The AU Special Envoy also expressed concerns over issues relating to the situation of human rights and illegal exploitation of the natural resources of the Territory by Morocco, as well as the worsening humanitarian situation, which is driven, in part, by the decrease in funding to support the refugees in the harsh conditions of the camps. He further called on the UN Security Council to provide a human rights mandate in the renewal of MINURSO's mandate.

Lastly, The AU Special Envoy expressed the AU's appreciation to the Permanent Representatives of Angola and Venezuela for convening the Arria-formula Meeting on Western Sahara, aimed at promoting dialogue and transparency on the discussion of the

situation in Western Sahara in the search for a just and durable solution that will provide for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Former President Chissano further expressed his appreciation and gratitude to the UN Secretariat for facilitating his mission, as well as to the Staff of the AU Permanent Mission to the UN for their assistance.