



Message from HE Ambassador Smail Chergui, Peace and Security Commissioner of the African Union Commission on the occasion of the African Border Day celebration, June 7, 2017

Dear Fellow Africans,

On the 7th of June 2017, we will celebrate African Border Day, as we did in previous years, since its establishment by the African Border Ministers on May 25, 2010. This celebration is an opportunity to highlight the African Union Border Program (AUBP) and invite Member States to become more involved in its implementation in order to prevent conflicts and promote continental and regional integration.

Between 2007 and 2017, the African Union Border Program made significant progress in the areas of delimitation and demarcation of boundaries, cross-border cooperation and capacity building. Joint commissions have been relentlessly working to delimit and demarcate their common interstate borders. Demarcation treaties and cross-border cooperation agreements have been developed and signed by Member States. National border management policies have been defined and national programs and plans for their implementation have been developed. Educational tools and knowledge on border management have been produced and widely disseminated. Cross-border cooperation initiatives are undertaken at the Regional Economic Communities level.

This means that through this program we are working collectively and resolutely to transform African interstate borders into bridges and therefore promoting the free movement of people, goods and services.

Indeed, thanks to the commitment of Member States, Regional Economic Communities and the Commission of the African Union, the subject of border is no longer taboo. Rather, it is now a part of peaceful and constructive bilateral or multilateral discussions and exchanges.

Better yet, they are increasingly seen as points of inception and operationalization of socio-economic policies, as evidenced by the provisions contained in the African Union Convention on Cross-border Cooperation, known as the Niamey Convention, adopted in 2014 and in the process of ratification. The implementation of this Convention will enable the transformation of border zones and cross-border areas into spaces conducive to regional and continental integration processes.

Seen from this perspective, borders are potentially an instrument, or even a resource, to implement the aspiration contained in the Agenda 2063: "a continent of seamless borders and management of cross-border resources through dialogue". More specifically, the Action Plan of this Agenda contains joint cross-border investments to exploit shared natural resources, promote peaceful conflict prevention and dispute resolutions and silence the guns by 2020.

This substantial contribution of borders to the achievement of the objectives of Peace and Stabilization in Africa illustrates the strategic importance of AUBP. It is with this conviction that I make a strong appeal to Member States, Regional Economic Communities and all other stakeholders to take the necessary steps to consolidate the achievements of AUBP and widen its scope of implementation.

We must all the more respond to the imperative to amplify these achievements considering that current security issues and challenges are mainly concentrated in the border areas. More than ever, it is in these national border areas and cross-border areas, which are a haven for organized crime, cross-border crime and terrorist groups, that we must focus our attention and our efforts to prevent conflicts, promote peace, security and stability.

The dynamics of resilience of border areas, which will be stimulated by increased cross-border cooperation activities, will also make it possible to cope with the harmful effects of climate change with its series of natural disasters such as repeated droughts, recurrent floods, the depletion of resources such as water, grazing lands, croplands, etc. The adoption of more cooperative strategies on both sides of the border will guarantee efficiency and effectiveness in managing the forced displacement of people, food crises, humanitarian tragedies and conflicts related to the ownership and access to natural resources.

Dear Fellow Africans,

The purpose of the AUBP is certainly to prevent conflicts, but also to facilitate the resolution of border disputes, which, unfortunately, have tended to increase in recent years, notably with the development of oil exploration and mining. The discovery of natural resources in the subsoil and seabed of border areas sharpens national appetites and crystallizes land claims and disputes over borders. This is attested by the recent appeals of several Member States to the international courts in order to find a judicial settlement to their border dispute. Even if the jurisdictional route offers the guarantee of a verdict to which the parties in conflict are bound to comply, it remains, nevertheless, very costly, long and ends up defining a winner and a loser. This is not conducive to a climate of mutual understanding and agreement between neighboring States. It is therefore desirable to engage in dialogue and cooperation to resolve border disputes.

Allow me to remind you that the African Union Commission has instruments and mechanisms that put forward political and diplomatic means to find lasting solutions to border conflicts. I urge Member States, whenever necessary, to request the Commission of the African Union to make available preventive diplomacy instruments through mediation, good offices and negotiation mechanisms.

Dear Fellow Africans,

This year, the theme of African Border Day is the **role of the youth in conflict prevention and cross-border cooperation**. In so doing, it popularizes the African Union Assembly Decision (Assembly / AU / Dec.601 (XXVI) of January 2016, which enshrines the theme of 2017 as: **"harnessing the demographic dividend through investment in youth"**. In this regard, I would like to recall a strong recommendation contained in the Action Plan drawn up for the period of August 2016 through December 2017 urging all the Specialized Technical Committees (STCs), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other continental meetings of 2017 to identify their contribution in the exploitation of the demographic dividend through investment in youth and to harmonize the implementation of related continental policies.

In this regard, I encourage Member States to promote the involvement of the youth in conflict prevention and in the development of cross-border cooperation initiatives. Peaceful and stabilized border areas are resources that the youth can invest in by

developing income generating jobs; skills and expertise as well as social services. Therefore, in addition to structurally preventing conflicts in these areas by intervening on the root causes that trigger them, the youth will position themselves as key actors in the operationalization of cross-border cooperation. By taking part in this approach to developing border areas, Member States will concretely realize their objective of a people-centered development that will result in the on the ground realization of integration

The potential of border areas and youth as a resource should encourage Member States to sign, ratify, domesticate and implement the African Union Convention on Cross-border Cooperation (the Niamey Convention) if they haven't done so. I appeal to you and call upon the Member States to seize the opportunity of the African Border Day on June 7 to start the process of ratifying this important instrument.

I urge all Member States of the African Union to commemorate the 2017 African Border Day under the theme "the role of the youth in conflict prevention and cross-border cooperation" and I commend those who will celebrate it. My most heartfelt wish is to see, on that day, television and radio broadcasts spreading this theme throughout Africa, as well as conferences and debates, playful and educational activities in schools, sporting and cultural events and various inaugurations at the borders.

I hope that on June 7, 2017, special attention will be paid to the borders and that this call will be heard warmly welcomed throughout our continent. I wish you an excellent celebration of Africa Border Day.

Long live the African youth and long live Africa