

STATEMENT
BY
H.E ATO SEYOUM MESFIN, MINISTER OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

AT

THE OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE 5TH EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF DEFENCE

THE EASTERN AFRICA STANDBY BRIGADE

November 3, 2009

Addis Ababa

Your Excellency, Honourable Mohammed Dossar Bacar, Director of Cabinet and In-charge of Defence in the Office of the President,
Union of the Comoros,

Excellencies, Ministers of Defence and Security of the Eastern Africa region,
Your Excellency Amb. Lamamra, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security,
Excellencies, Heads of Delegation,
Excellency, Mr. Peter Marwa, Acting Director of the Eastern Africa Standby Brigade Coordination Mechanism,

Distinguished Participants,
Invited Guests, ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and People of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and on my own behalf, I wish to extend a warm welcome to all the participants to this important meeting of the Ministers of Defence of EASBRIG. Ethiopia is greatly honoured for having been given the opportunity to host this Extra-Ordinary Session of the Council.

Excellency Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,

Our region continues to face daunting challenges in the area of peace and security. First among these challenges is the on-going conflict in Somalia. The conflict in Somalia has ceased long ago to be a conflict between Somalis. Rather, it has been hijacked by foreign fighters, whose agenda goes far beyond Somalia and our region, and constitutes one of the most serious threats to regional and international peace and security.

These extremists, who are bent on wreaking havoc and mayhem, are receiving full support and funding from their backers. Conversely, the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia is receiving less support from the international community in its efforts to stabilize the country.

The African Union and IGAD have been doing whatever is necessary and within the limit of their capacity to assist the Transitional Federal Government in achieving peace and stability in the country. The latest horrific suicide car attacks against the African Union Peacekeepers in Somalia, which took the lives of 21 peacekeepers, have not weakened the continent's resolve to bring about lasting peace in the country.

We honour those who have fallen for the cause of peace and praise the sacrifices being made by Uganda and Burundi in the time-tested spirit of Pan-Africanist solidarity.

The strong commitment of Africa to the cause of peace in Somalia and at the same time the apparent low priority given to the unfolding crisis in Somalia by the international community is a stark reminder of the necessity to continuously strengthen our regional and continental peace and security mechanisms.

At all levels — regional or continental— we should act with a great sense of urgency to establish and operationalize the continent's peace and security architecture. A lot has been achieved, namely with the establishment of the African Union Peace and Security Council, which has enabled the continent to have a strong collective voice on matters of peace and security affecting us.

But a lot more is expected of us in order to deal with conflict situations in a timely and effective manner. In this respect, the establishment and operationalization of regional brigades, of which EASBRIG is one component, as part of the African Standby Force, is absolutely critical. It is incumbent upon us to show the requisite political commitment through the contribution of troops and the provision of the necessary financial resources.

Excellency, Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,

The attainment of peace and security in our region is critical in creating an enabling environment for economic development and integration. In addition to the immense human suffering and destruction that conflicts inflict on the peoples of the continent and our region, incalculable resources that could otherwise be used in the war against poverty are being

squandered. The real enemy of our people, poverty, cannot be defeated unless we manage to create a peaceful and secure environment.

The goal of a peaceful and secure East Africa region is not outside our reach. It requires that we forge an ever stronger coordination and cooperation. In this regard, despite numerous challenges, EASBRIG Member States have been working together and making remarkable progress in ensuring that EASBRIG attains its initial operating capability, in line with African Standby Force roadmap.

We must remain focused and redouble our efforts in obtaining our force preparation and generation capability. The Force Training Exercise planned for the end of this year in Djibouti will, undoubtedly, lay one solid foundation in this endeavour.

Permit me to underline one important point here. It seems to me, we should always do whatever is necessary to maintain and strengthen our unity and, as much as possible, to carry out our tasks by consensus, particularly on points of principle. Doing so is critical for building trust which is indispensable for the kind of responsibility you carry. This is also required by the great challenge we face in our region. We have to be methodical and correct to a fault in terms of complying with guidelines and instructions from the highest level. Military discipline will also require it.

I would like to assure you that Ethiopia will leave no stone unturned in ensuring the success of our organization. We remain committed to the very critical objective that EASBRIG is created to achieve. We are part of a larger project whose noble objective is to ensure peace and security is advanced and protected in our continent. Though, as I suggested earlier, ours is a daunting undertaking, there is no reason why we should not succeed. Our solidarity and our joint commitment is the key for success. I wish to assure you that we in Ethiopia will never be wanting in this regard. I wish you success in your deliberations and declare the meeting officially opened.

I thank you!