**AU's investigations on sexual exploitation and abuse in Somalia: HRWG calls for action**

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The Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) on Somalia, consisting of EU member states, the EU, Norway, Switzerland and the United States has been following closely the developments surrounding the publication of the Human Rights Watch report on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by African Union Forces in Somalia and is encouraged by the recently published African Union's response on this issue.

The Group considers the response to reflect a positive attempt by the AU to investigate the allegations of sexual violence made in the HRW report. The Group is encouraged by the recommendations. It is now important for the AU to actively follow-up on their implementation; this would constitute the first step in the process of ensuring that AU Peace Support Operations (PSO) follow best practices. The Group thus encourages the AU to urgently establish a competent, independent and properly resourced permanent oversight body.

The Group notes the importance of ensuring shared responsibility between AMISOM and Troop Contributing Countries in holding individuals accountable for their conduct. It calls on AMISOM TCC's to ensure full accountability and facilitate access for investigative units in all cases involving their personnel and to conduct thorough and impartial investigations into any allegations and ensure appropriate legal action.

We encourage the African Union to ensure the thorough application of the mechanisms it has developed to prevent and respond to issues of misconduct and abuse in peace support operations, in accordance with the AU’s zero-tolerance policy on this matter.

It remains important, moreover, for the AU to establish an Independent Complaints Mechanism in Mogadishu, which would allow the victims of abuses to file their complaints with a guarantee of total confidentiality and protection from reprisal. We encourage the SRCC and Sector Commanders to send a strong signal to AMISOM personnel that reprisals against survivors and whistle-blowers cannot be tolerated. The deployment of military courts and the setting-up of a Provost Marshall Unit, as per the recommendations, would be an important step forward in this respect.

We encourage the Protection, Human Rights and Gender Unit of the AU to ensure that AMISOM operations are conducted in strict compliance with International Humanitarian and Human Rights law and call upon the AU to carry-out additional and specific training of PSO staff and personnel on gender issues and human rights (on the basis of the AU Gender Training Manual for AU Peace Support Operations), and the further deployment of Human Rights Observers in conflict areas.
The HRWG notes that the responsibility to uphold humanitarian and international human rights law in Somalia rests equally with all security and armed forces active in the country. The HRWG repeats its call to the Federal Government of Somalia to start implementing the National Action Plan against sexual violence to end impunity, guarantee due process and safeguard the rights of victims and persons at risk.

AMISOM and the Somali Security Forces play an essential role in creating the conditions in which all Somalis are be able to enjoy their fundamental rights. The international community will continue to work closely with AMISOM and the Somali Security Forces to this end, and for the security forces to work within a human rights framework. (END)