

Guest of Honour, Cabinet Secretary for Defence, **Amb.
Raychelle Omamo,**

Colleagues, Distinguished Chiefs of Defence Staff,

Director EASFCOM,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Invited Guests,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you to Kenya and to this session of the Committee of the Eastern Africa Chiefs of Defence and Security. I am greatly honoured and pleased to make my maiden appearance, belated as it may be, in the capacity of the Chairperson of this forum. I thank the Member States for once again bestowing on the Republic of Kenya the honour and privilege of hosting the EASF Policy Organs Meetings and take this opportunity to reaffirm Kenya's unstinting support in facilitating a fruitful round of Policy Organs Meetings.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff of Eastern Africa is a central organ of EASF that is mandated with overseeing programmes and activities of the institution on behalf of the Council of Ministers. Reviewing policy proposals, organizational framework and general administrative guidelines for recommendation for approval by the Council comprise some of the core planks of our oversight mandate. Consequently the onus of ensuring that EASFCOM prudently and effectively manages Member States' resources lies squarely with us and

more so the authoritative supervision necessary to guarantee proper coordination of EASF activities as well as implementation of its development agenda.

Esteemed Delegates,

The sustained development of EASF as manifested by the establishment of EASF integrated structures that embrace multidimensionality is clear for all to see. These structures have been tested in various exercises to gauge and consolidate our cohesion culminating in FTX *Mashariki Salaam* in May last year

in Jinja, Uganda. No one should therefore begrudge us relishing the decent measure of progress that we have attained so far! Nonetheless, realization of Full Operational Capability by 2015, a milestone that previously seemed to reside far off in the horizon, is now looming large close at hand! We therefore have neither the option nor the luxury of delaying its realization any more. Having said that, I hasten to caution that attainment of FOC should not be the culmination of our aspirations for EASF but a benchmark and a modest step on the journey towards attainment of all our Strategic Objectives and Vision!

As the time tested saying goes, *the proof of the pudding is in the eating!* Consequently, attainment of necessary thresholds for deployment of robust EASF contingents will not only justify our existence but also vindicate the investment and trust of the peoples of Eastern Africa in EASF. The EASF Technical Advisory Team sent to Somalia under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) auspices in early 2010 remains our singular act of direct participation in peace support operations in an active mission! It nonetheless was a step in the right direction; a lone brave arrow into the bush that should have

encouraged us to speed up discharge of the quiver! Having said that, and on a realistic assessment of current troops and equipment pledges, practicality of our conflict early warning system and capability of the logistic support infrastructure among others, much more remains to be done before we can realistically deploy in any of the more demanding AU Deployment Scenarios.

As I speak, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya have troops in Somalia under the aegis of AMISOM. We are proud of our contributions that demonstrate availability of capability

within the region to generate and deploy credible forces. We however would have been much more proud were EASF the umbrella body at the vanguard of this endeavor. That would have demonstrated beyond all doubts that we have come of age and are walking the talk of '*African solutions to African problems*'. The tragic situation prevailing in Southern Sudan further underscores the urgency for operationalization of EASF so that it can occupy its due place at the heart of coordinated regional efforts towards conflict detection, prevention, mitigation and resolution.

Distinguished Delegates,

Issues that seem to hold us back from attainment of objectives are not insuperable. I am convinced that we have the requisite resolve and resilience to overcome them. Thus, as we meet today to deliberate on the agenda before us, the need for fresh vigor and impetus need not be overemphasized.

Whereas I do not intend, at this juncture, to delve into the substantive agenda of our meeting, I find it necessary to highlight some key issues that require our keen attention.

Implementation of Rapid Deployment Capabilities (RDCs) is one such issue. As the Distinguished Chiefs of Defence Staff are aware, the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) was intended to be just a stop gap measure pending full operationalization of RDCs. The apparent reluctance to zealously pursue development of RDCs to optimal operational levels is a huge indictment of our collective will.

I find it necessary also to underscore the significance of discussions on Experts' recommendations on the Report on Strategic Review of EASF. It is imperative that we chart a

holistic and unambiguous 'Way Forward' for the EASF beyond FOC that addresses financial and administrative challenges among others. Staffing concerns within EASF structures also need to be urgently addressed with a view to improving efficiency and streamlining operations.

Distinguished Delegates,

As we march towards FOC in 2015, I note with appreciation the significant contributions made to our organization by our Friends and International Partners. They have helped us grow

from the very initial faltering steps for which we are deeply grateful. Nevertheless, we must be courageous enough to acknowledge that we have outgrown being led by the hand and must take full control of our faculties and walk unaided! EASF must therefore stand up, gaze into the future, face its vision and march on to confront its destiny!

Finally, as I acknowledge the role that EASFCOM continues to play in coordination of EASF activities, I once again thank you all, Distinguished Chiefs of Staff, for being able to attend this Committee session.