

**Remarks by Hans Hofmeijer, Acting Regional Director ILO
on the occasion of the Joint Consultative Workshop on
HIV interventions in AU Peace Support Operations
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8 October 2013**

Distinguished colleagues, it is a pleasure and a privilege for me to address you today. I am very glad to see that this meeting, which started out as a joint African Union Commission – ILO initiative has mobilized so many other UN participants. This clearly reflects its importance. I am also particularly happy to welcome the representatives of troop- and police-contributing countries.

Strengthening and mainstreaming interventions to help prevent and combat HIV and AIDS in AU peacekeeping operations is something that should probably have started much earlier. But I am sure that the protocol that this meeting will adopt will provide a proper and effective framework for future interventions. And who knows, perhaps it can become a model for a similar framework for peacekeeping operations worldwide. In this context it is worthwhile to note that already in 2001 the UN declared HIV/AIDS a potential threat to the security, health and well-being of peacekeepers.

My colleague, Alice Ouedraogo, Director of ILO-AIDS, the ILO's programme on HIV AIDS, will in the coming days no doubt explain to you in more detail what the ILO does to combat HIV/AIDS through workplace interventions. I should just like to mention here that we have recently launched two global campaigns; one is entitled Zero at Work and the other Voluntary Counselling and Testing at Work. For the ILO extending these campaigns to the military and police forces in AU peacekeeping operations is only a logical next step. After all, peacekeepers are also workers.

Peacekeepers are highly mobile and often work in difficult circumstances. This obviously makes them extremely vulnerable to HIV and other infections. Their health and safety are essential not only for effective operations and the success of their missions but also for the health of host communities. Peacekeepers can and should become agents for change and help reduce HIV and other infections by promoting and demonstrating responsible and healthy behaviour.

I have no doubt that the draft protocol, which is set to harmonize the responses of individual countries to the needs of peacekeepers and develop standard operating procedures, will be a huge step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS in AU peacekeeping operations. Having said that, let us also be mindful of other health challenges that peacekeepers face in the course of carrying out their duties. We should not pride ourselves for saving a life from HIV/AIDS but lose it to malaria or unsafe working conditions when we can take the necessary measures to prevent this at little incremental cost.

Finally, I should like to mention that I recently had the privilege of attending the first meeting of the UNAIDS-Lancet Commission on HIV/AIDS. The figures on HIV/AIDS infection presented at the meeting indicated that, thanks to intensive information campaigns and retroviral treatment becoming more widely available, infection rates are declining. This does not mean however that we should lower our guard since the experience in the industrialized countries shows the enormous risk of infection rates rising again when HIV/AIDS is no longer a major subject of attention for the media and policymakers. We also need to keep in mind of course that Africa still bears the greatest burden of HIV/AIDS. The battle is not yet won!

The challenges are great but I trust that this meeting, the protocol and, most importantly, its follow up will make an important contribution to ensuring that at least among AU peacekeepers in Africa infection rates will decline.

Thank you.