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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by

Amb. Amr Aljowaily

Director, Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO), African Union Commission

at the

GCSP Global Alumni Networking Night (GANN) in Addis Ababa, hosted by the Embassy of Switzerland

"Africa in a Changing World Order: People, Diaspora and Justice as Imperatives for Peace"

Swiss Interim Residence, Addis Ababa — 5 November 2026

Your Excellency Ambassador Riccarda Chanda, Ambassador of Switzerland to Ethiopia, Djibouti and South Sudan, and Permanent Observer to the African Union, UNECA and IGAD,
Colonel GS Urs Sulser, Defense Attaché, Embassy of Switzerland,
Mr. Mulualem Yakob Ayalew, Leader of the GCSP Ethiopia Alumni Hub,
Mr. Desta Kahsay Negussie,
Dear GCSP alumni and friends,

Allow me at the outset to thank our hosts. To Ambassador Chanda and the Embassy of Switzerland: appreciation for opening your residence this evening, and for Switzerland's steady engagement as Permanent Observer to the African Union. To Colonel Sulser, himself a GCSP alumnus, my thanks for steering us through this evening. To Mr. Mulualem and the Ethiopia Alumni Hub, congratulations on a year of achievements. To Ms. Eden Getachew Bekele and the Embassy team, thank you for the care behind every detail. And to the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, and to Ms. Isabelle Gillet, Head of its Alumni and Community Engagement Office, my gratitude for the invitation. I am told that dinner follows the presentations, which is the best guarantee that I will keep to my ten minutes.

I stand before you tonight not only as an invited speaker from the African Union Commission, but also as a fellow GCSP alumnus. When I served in Belgrade, I had the privilege of supporting the opening of the GCSP hub there, and over the years I have participated in a number of GCSP activities, one of which I had the pleasure to share with our gracious host today, Amb. **Chanda**. So it is a special joy to see the Ethiopia Hub thrive here, in Addis Ababa, the seat of African multilateralism. This evening is, in itself, a network: men and women who learned together in Geneva and now serve across Africa

and beyond. In a sense, we are a diaspora of Geneva's multilateralism, carrying its ideas and bringing them home. Please hold on to that thought, because networks are my subject tonight.

We are living through a change of order, not merely a change of weather. Power is more widely shared, alliances are more fluid, and the institutions built in 1945, when most of Africa was not yet free to sit at the table, are under strain. Africa enters this moment with real assets: Member States that make up more than a quarter of the membership of the United Nations; the youngest population in the world; and, since 2023, a permanent seat for the African Union in the Group of Twenty. This year, an African proposal championed by Togo, endorsed by the Union and coordinated by our Directorate as the Commission's focal point, to correct the map of the world so that Africa appears at its true size, became within seven months a United Nations General Assembly resolution adopted with 164 votes. How the world sees Africa shapes how the world treats Africa.

My first lesson from years in diplomacy is simple: today, influence flows from one's networks and the legitimacy of one's cause. That is why the three areas of work of our Directorate are, in my view, imperatives for peace.

The first is people: engaging the present. Engaging citizens is not a courtesy to civil society; it is a doctrine of the peace and development nexus. Peace agreements signed in capitals hold only when they are owned in communities. In June, with our colleagues of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, we brought together in Accra traditional, inter-faith and judicial leaders in support of Silencing the Guns. In September, the Commission hosted the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers at its headquarters, the network's first such meeting in Africa. Security is built in chancelleries, but it is sustained in mosques, churches, shrines, courtrooms and union halls.

The second is the diaspora: investing in the future. The African Union defines its Diaspora as peoples of African origin living outside the continent who are willing to contribute to its development and to the building of the Union. They bring financial capital, with transfers of some one hundred billion US dollars a year, as well as skills, knowledge and voices in the capitals where decisions are made.

They are also partners in peace. Diaspora communities know the conflicts of their countries of origin intimately; they can support mediation, finance reconstruction and counter disinformation. We must also be candid: the same networks, if left unengaged, can carry division rather than reconciliation. This is why, together with Political Affairs, Peace and Security, we launched the African Diaspora for Peace Initiative, whose first pilot mission took place last October. Nowhere is this more relevant than in Africa and across its seas and oceans, where families, trade and conflicts have long crossed the water in both directions.

The third is justice: healing the past. Those of you trained in transitional justice know that wounds left unaddressed do not heal by themselves; they reopen, and they pass from one generation to the next. The African Union's Reparations Agenda applies that same logic at the scale of history. The Union has proclaimed 2026 to 2035 the Decade of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations, and on 30 November, in a few weeks, Africa will observe for the first time a Day to remember the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, colonization and apartheid. In March, the

United Nations General Assembly recognized the transatlantic racialized trafficking in enslaved Africans as the gravest crime against humanity. And International Geneva has become one of the homes of this conversation, from the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, which we are proud to host for the first time ever on African soil in April 2027, to the High-Level Dialogue on reparatory justice convened by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights last month.

Reparatory justice, as we understand it, is neither charity nor guilt. It is repair: of relations, of memory and of the inequalities that history left behind. A world order that cannot acknowledge its foundations will struggle to earn the trust it needs to keep the peace. Through that prism, we need not only to reimagine but to rebuild global governance in a way that addresses the historical injustice of the continuing absence, or marginalization, of Africa in its decision-making bodies, foremost among them the permanent membership category of the UN Security Council, as well as Africa's due weight in the international financial institutions.

Dear friends,

People, the diaspora and justice are the present, the future and the past of the same story. For practitioners of peace and security, I would leave you with three suggestions: bring citizens, including faith and traditional leaders and trade unions, into the design of prevention and mediation; treat the diaspora as a strategic partner; and recognize historical justice as part of conflict prevention. Our Directorate would be glad to work with GCSP and with the Ethiopia Alumni Hub to take these ideas further.

Ubuntu, a profound African philosophical principle and proverb, reminds us that "I am because we are". Africa is narrating its own story, and by doing so it is rewriting the global story, in a way that not only preserves but promotes the spirit of Ubuntu. I invite you, as a network of peace, to help us contribute to its next chapter, titled "*Africa in a Changing World Order: People, Diaspora and Justice as Imperatives for Peace"*.

Thank you.