Welcome Address by H.E. Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Your Excellencies, President Yoweri Museveni; President Ismail Omar Guelleh; President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed,

Your Excellencies former presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Thabo Mbeki; Excellencies, Ministers,
Dear participants,

It gives me pleasure to welcome you all to Bahir Dar for the inaugural meeting of the Tana security conference. And to do so on behalf not only of the people and government of Ethiopia, but also on behalf of the people and government of the Amhara Region and the city of Bahir Dar. I hope the citizens of Bahir Dar won’t mind for the fact that this meeting has coincided with Easter.

I am grateful to you all for making time in the context of your busy schedule to attend this meeting. In this regard my special thanks go to the current and former heads of states who have honoured us with their presence.

I wish to also thank Professor Andreas Eshete and his colleagues for conceiving and organising this meeting on a shoe string budget, in particular young people who are engaged in the organisation of this conference from across the continent. Thank you very much.

But I hope the young people won’t mind when I say none of these would have happened had my brother president Obasanjo not agreed to shoulder the responsibility of chairing the board of directors of the Tana peace conference. So, thank you chief for your leadership and contribution.

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am sure many of you are wondering why we need the Tana peace conference when we have many institutions and mechanisms designed to address insecurity in our continent. The Tana peace conference is not intended to duplicate or replace the work of our already existing institutions, but to supplement and reinforce them. Unlike most, if not all of our institutions, the conference is conducted in an informal setting. It involves not only political leaders, but also army and security officials, academics and businessmen. It gathers all stakeholders in the security of our continent. These, I believe will be one of its unique characteristics which will enable it to have a unique perspective that could inform and reinforce the efforts of other institutions.

The Tana peace conference doesn’t make decisions or issue statements on African security issues. It limits itself to an open and varied discussion on these matters without the inhibitions posed by
the need to reach consensus in order to issue a statement or make a decision. There are no winners and losers here, just people gathered for an uninhibited discussion on matters of human security in our continent. That too, I believe, is a unique characteristic of this conference that will enable it to supplement the institutions that we already have.

The Tana peace conference will combine academics and thinkers with generals and diplomats and other practitioners; businessmen with political leaders. This will allow it to have a deeper understanding of issues selected for discussion without tipping over debates and discussion. I think this is another added advantage of the conference.

Last but certainly not least, the conference will give key stakeholders in the renaissance of our continent, a unique opportunity to establish contacts and network, to exchange notes, and get to know each other well. I would suggest that this alone would justify the establishment of the Tana peace conference as one more institution on the list of security related institutions of our continent.

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This conference is intended to be a once a year gathering. The hope and expectation is that this new institution will grow from strength to strength every year to rival and even surpass the only similar institution that I know of, the Munich Security Conference. But that cannot happen without the full support and engagement of everyone here and our colleagues who are unable to join us today. I am sure I can count on your support and advocacy for the Tana peace conference so that it will become an institution that we are all proud of.

I thank you for your kind attention.