Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to be here this morning. I am delighted to address at this timely seminar on “Security Sector Reform in Africa: the role and contribution of the United Nations.”

This important event is one in a series of UNOG-DCAF events on security sector reform (SSR). Past seminars have provided very useful fora for discussions on a number of critical SSR-related issues. These included the relationship between SSR and human rights protection, and the enhancement of coordination in SSR between the United Nations and regional organizations.

My comments this morning will build on these events while also seeking to address the core questions guiding our discussions today. During my remarks, I will attempt to provide a general overview of the SSR environment. I will then consider the role of the UN in supporting SSR in the continent including through our special partnership with the African Union. Next, I will discuss DPKO’s view of the comparative advantages of both the AU and the UN in supporting SSR in Africa. While we are aware of the limitations of generalizations, the African security environment has been characterized by a number of trends.

First, Africa, like other parts of the world, has witnessed a shift in focus from border or often regime security to a broader, more comprehensive security agenda according to which the well-being of a community, a nation or a people, and its development are fundamental. Secondly, there has been considerable progress in Africa on many fronts and in particular in the security sector area. However, there is also recognition that in many cases security institutions in Africa have often been unable to provide effective, professional and republican security services. Too often African States have a limited security reach. The State has been a crucial but by no means the only actor in security provision. In Africa, as elsewhere, informal and non-state security and justice
mechanisms have in many contexts been important – if not the primary – providers of these critical public services. In addition, there have been striking cases where security institutions have been functioning outside the rule of law or have become “a state within a state”. In some cases their relationships with society were even predatory, rather than protective.

These contradictory dynamics and the corresponding requirement for fundamental reform in Africa were recently described by African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, His Excellency Ramtane Lamamra, during his remarks at the March 2009 regional consultation on SSR co-hosted by the AU and the UN in Addis Ababa. On that occasion, he noted that, in Africa:

“[s]ome Member States face huge challenges that make it difficult for them to fulfill their security obligations to their own citizens. In other Member States, the security forces have, for one reason or another, become a threat to ordinary citizens. For these reasons, some African Member States clearly need to reform their security sectors...”

This audience knows that the African Union has recognized that security sector management is part of a broader governance agenda. SSR can play a critical role in re-defining the often destructive relations of power between the security apparatus and the population. The inverse is also true: effective SSR is not possible without broader reform of the core governance institutions that provide an oversight function, including the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary.

Thirdly, experiences in Africa have shown that a professional security sector is essential not only for sustainable development. It is also a vital component of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding in general. For example, the failure to address the security sector in a structured way in Liberia in the 1990s led to a return to conflict. In contrast, addressing SSR early in the peace process in Burundi resulted in building essential foundations for sustainable peacebuilding and the South African experience demonstrates the importance of political commitment, ownership, broad consultation and sufficient resources in building sustainable security sectors.

In addition, as we increasingly see, African States are not only recipients but are also critical providers of security reform assistance. For example, South Africa and Angola are assisting national authorities with SSR – particularly the reform of the army – in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Egypt has provided training to Burundian police officers. Nigeria has also expressed its commitment to assist Burundian authorities to build the capacity of the national defence force and police while also helping, together with Ghana and others, the armed forces of Liberia. These are only a few examples of this increasingly growing phenomenon.

Finally, some security threats are increasingly beyond the reach of any state, no matter how powerful: small arms proliferation, human and drug trafficking, money laundering, piracy, terrorism, and even civil wars know no borders. This reality demonstrates the clear need for, and relevance of, regional approaches to the professionalization of security services.
Recognition of this imperative and the role of multilateral approaches to SSR led to the decision of African Heads of State at the January/February 2008 Summit directed the AU Commission to develop a comprehensive AU policy framework on SSR. Prior to this decision, the AU Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development framework had identified SSR as one of the main components for addressing conflicts in Africa.

What has been the UN’s role in supporting SSR in Africa? The UN has been actively involved in SSR for decades, with the first formal reference to “security sector” appearing in Security Council Resolution 1436 on Sierra Leone in 2002. Currently, most UN field Missions are mandated to undertake SSR or related activities. While not exclusively limited to Africa, many of these operations are on the continent, including in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Sudan. In Africa the UN’s engagement in SSR varies from context to context, the Organization provides support to national authorities in a number of SSR-related areas, including training and infrastructure development, capacity-building for management and oversight of security institutions, strategic advice for the development of national security policies, strategies and plans, as well as assistance coordinating international partners in support of national SSR priorities, among a range of other activities.

African countries have greatly contributed to these activities. Africa has provided tens of thousands of troops participating in 17 UN peacekeeping operations. Africa is also contributing tens of thousands of its personnel to the maintenance of regional security via the African Union or hybrid operations. Africa also provides thousands of officers to the overall 11,500 police personnel deployed by the UN.

In addition to the wide security sector expertise found in DPKO (which covers the military, political, police, justice, corrections, mine action, DDR, SSR and other key aspects), extensive SSR support and expertise is provided by other UN entities. For example, the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) has been focusing on the security sector in peacemaking processes and in the context of the offices or missions it leads. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) addresses the reform of human rights institutions and capacity-building for security actors, while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has expertise in supporting institutional development in the areas of justice and security, as well as in legislative and civil society oversight. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has proven strengths in supporting the enhancement of crime prevention capacities, while the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) brings knowledge and expertise on the gender dimensions of security sector reform, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has expertise on protecting the rights of children by conducting training and other activities directed at security institutions like the police and military. And we are proud that in many circumstances, the UN is working very closely with others, including bilateral donors and DCAF.

For us at the UN, the recognition that SSR requires a multi-dimensional approach predicated on a pooling of inter-departmental resources which has led to the creation of the UN interagency SSR Task Force, which currently comprises 11 Agencies, Departments, Offices, Funds and Programs, and which is chaired by DPKO. The Task
Force is a mechanism for information-sharing, coordination and coherence. It is also engaged in the development of guidance, training, managing the on-line Community of Practice and a Roster of SSR Experts. It also serves as repository of best practices and lessons learned, and it is involved in other elements of a system-wide capacity-building program.

In addition, the recognition of SSR as an essential component of a viable peacekeeping exit strategy has informed the establishment of our SSR Unit within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, positioned in my office, the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions or OROLSI. This Unit is young and composed of a small but very dynamic group of officers with SSR expertise. Placing the SSR Unit within OROLSI, where our police, criminal law and judicial advisory, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and mine action capacities are also located has greatly enhanced synergies between these related areas as well as between those provided by Member States, regional organizations and other UN entities.

The UN also provides a rich resource for the development of a viable regional normative framework. The Organization has articulated its fundamental approach to SSR in the January 2008 Secretary-General’s report which serves as an overarching framework for the Organization’s engagement in this strategic field.

However, the UN does not impose or advocate any particular model of a security sector configuration or reform. Accordingly, the Secretary-General’s report provides a flexible definition of security sector management, which is described as “process of assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation led by national authorities that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.”

Despite this flexibility, the UN’s approach to SSR is predicated on a number of critical assumptions:

- First, we believe that an SSR framework is essential in the planning and implementation of post-conflict activities and should ideally begin at the outset of any such process, even at the early negotiation stage. In addition, without effective and accountable security sectors, there is no exit for regional or international peacekeeping.
- Second, it is universally recognized that SSR should be nationally-owned and should be undertaken on the basis of a national request, a Security Council mandate and/or a General Assembly resolution in accordance with the UN Charter and standards. Support in this area must be anchored on national ownership and the commitment of involved States and societies.
- Third, Member States remain the leading providers of assistance; the UN role in the area will not be comprehensive. But as I will discuss in a moment, the UN is often well-positioned to coordinate the external assistance.
- At the same time, any security sector is linked to the overall rule of law context, democratization, good governance, national budgetary processes, and parliamentary processes, civil society involvement and even human rights.
This is why, together with our Addis Ababa colleagues we agreed that the AU stands to benefit directly from the experiences of the UN in how to engage multiple state actors, which is sometimes very sensitive politically.

With active support from UNDP, the Governments of Argentina and Slovakia hosted a regional consultation the Latin American consultation on the United Nations approach to SSR in Buenos Aires in September. A similar consultation, which places SSR within the broader agenda of multi-dimensional peacekeeping and peacebuilding, will be held in Jakarta in early 2010 by the Governments of Indonesia and Slovakia. In Africa, as noted earlier, the African Union and the United Nations co-hosted a “Regional Workshop on SSR in Africa” in March 2009 in Addis.

Accordingly, the AU and the UN are fast developing strategic collaboration based on each Organization’s comparative advantage. This collaboration has two main goals: 1) to assist the AU with the development of its comprehensive SSR policy framework and 2) to support the AU in building its own capacities to implement this framework, and 3) most importantly, to make a real impact in recipient nations.

The partnership identifies a number of core activities that will be jointly undertaken by the AU and the UN over the next 3 to 5 years. For example, together with other partners we will support the AU to develop key policy tools, including a doctrine and a code of conduct for security institutions in Africa, guidance on harmonizing national security legislation and a manual on SSR best practices and lessons learned in Africa. Together we will also conduct joint SSR assessment missions to mutual priority countries to help ensure more effective and comprehensive delivery. In addition, the UN will in training/sensitization workshops for AU experts. This will be done at AU HQ, in the field as well as with the Regional Economic Communities – the first such training was delivered jointly by the AU and our SSR Unit in Addis in November. We will share with the AU the electronic platform of the UN’s SSR Community of Practice and provide to the AU our list of experts from our roster of experts.

While both organizations continue to work to achieve these elements of strategic collaboration, it is crucial to consider the challenges we face:

A core challenge facing all multilateral and bilateral actors providing SSR support is – as I mentioned earlier – ensuring national ownership and context of SSR processes. Too often security sector transformation runs the risk of being imposed by external actors, particularly in contexts of post-conflict situations. Yet, externally imposed models are often mismatched with the political, social and cultural realities and are therefore not sustainable. The UN’s legitimacy and neutrality make it well suited to enhance national ownership, including by supporting national and international dialogue processes on SSR. The AU is also well positioned to do the same.

This begs a critical question: How can external support – particularly UN and AU support – enhance rather than undermine national ownership of SSR in Africa and elsewhere? We are determined to find the right answers to this crucial question.
Challenges in the coordination of SSR support also remain including in Africa. While ownership is critical for the success of SSR programming, external support - particularly in post-conflict contexts - is also vital. However, external support is often uncoordinated and, in some cases, highly politicized. The may in many contexts be best positioned to help identify gaps and to coordinate SSR efforts. Together with other partners, we should continue to identify and share best practices with regards to the modalities and political realities of effective coordination.

In many African states, the role of the State is indispensable but not sufficient for effective security governance; and non-state providers often play a very important function. This raises another important question: How can both the AU and the UN ensure a viable engagement of a wide segment of a society and create the broadest possible process? Another challenge which deserves to be addressed together with the AU are privatization of the security field and new aspects relevant to the organized crime, piracy, cyber crime etc.

At the same time, there is a need for conceptual clarity and unity among multilateral organizations providing SSR support. This is why the coherent UN support to the AU and to African sub-regional organizations is so useful. While the AU and others will craft their own definition of the security sector and of security sector reform, the UN’s comprehensive and active support will allow us to share our experiences in designing definitions and generate the unity of action.

And on top of that, key questions remain about the appropriate terminology for both the UN and the AU. While the UN has historically used the term “security sector reform”, feedback from the field indicates that there is some reluctance by national partners to use of the term ‘reform’. Many appear to be more comfortable with the definition of the field as security sector transformation, management, development, and/or governance. In my personal view, the UN’s approach is better reflected in the use of terms like security sector transformation or management (which also connotes a broader agenda). These terms capture the underlining principles of both the UN’s approach and the AU’s emerging framework. Along with other partners, we all may want to move eventually toward changing our terminology to better reflect our intentions.

Of course, our approaches to SSR must evolve and progress as we continue to learn and to refine the delivery. In this evolution, it is my hope that we will collectively learn how best to address the many questions that will be discussed today. What we have embarked on is a historical journey as the security, sustainable development, and social progress of many nations depend on well managed and governed security institutions.