

AFRICAN UNION

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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL 789TH MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA 14 AUGUST 2018

PSC/PR/BR. (DCCLXXXIX)

PRESS STATEMENT

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) dedicated its 789th meeting held on 14th August 2018, to an Open Session on the theme: "Ending Child Marriage in Africa".

Council and participants took note of the opening statements made by H.E Ambassador Susan Sikaneta, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zambia, in her capacity as the PSC Chairperson for the month of August 2018, and Major-General Francis Okello from the Peace and Security Department of the African Union, who read a statement on behalf of the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Smail Chergui. Council also took note of the presentations made by the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, H.E. Dr. Amira El Fadil, the representative of United Nations Children and Education Fund (UNICEF) to the African Union, Dr. Edward Addai, and the Director of Save the Children and Liaison Officer to the AU, Ms. Doris Mpoumou. Council further took note of the statements made by the representatives of AU Member States, and the representative of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), as well as by the representatives of AU partners, other institutions and organizations;

Council and participants recalled all existing AU normative frameworks for ending child marriage, including the African Common Position on Ending Child Marriage; the Joint African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights-African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACHPR-ACERWC) General Comment on Child Marriage; The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights. They also recalled the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005), in which the Security Council expressed its readiness to take appropriate sanctions against perpetrators of violence against children in conflict situations, as well as all relevant pronouncements and decisions of the PSC, in particular, Press Statement [PSC/PR/BR. (DCCVI)] and Communique [PSC/PR/COMM.(DCLXI)], adopted at the 706th and 661st meetings of the PSC held on 26th July 2017 and on 23rd February 2017 respectively. They further recalled the Executive Council Decision [EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI)], adopted at its 21st Ordinary Session, in which the Executive Council requested the PSC to take into account the rights of children in its agenda and to cooperate actively with the CERWC;

Council and participants emphasized that child marriage is a harmful social and cultural practice that disproportionately affects girls with a very negative effect on their normal personal growth, health, education and other opportunities in life and, in addition, it constitutes a serious violation of human rights. They also emphasized that child marriage undermines the contribution of girls to the overall national development and economic growth of their countries;

Council and participants took note of the fact that according to 2018 UNICEF statistics on child marriage, Sub-Saharan Africa currently has the highest levels of child marriage globally, having overtaken South Asia, and that about 4 out of every 10 girls in Africa are married before the age of 18. They also

noted that 6 of the 10 countries with the highest child marriage prevalence rates are in Africa, and that the rate of child marriage in those countries ranges from 45% to 80% of girls being married before 18;

Council and participants underscored the important role of legal frameworks in transforming norms and protecting the rights of children as a sign of the commitment of Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of ending Child Marriage by 2030. In this respect, they encouraged Member States to enact national laws that set the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys. They stressed the fact that promulgation of legislation alone is inadequate for ending child marriage. In this regard, they urged Member States to endorse the Safe Schools Programme and implement its Declaration, as well as to the need to ensure compulsory education for all children, both boys and girls. They also stressed the need for active pursuit of other additional measures that effectively and comprehensively address the underlying causes of child marriage;

Council and participants commended all Member States that had signed and ratified all AU and other relevant international normative instruments on the protection of children, particularly those relating to ending child marriage, and those that were submitting their implementation reports timely. In this regard, they encouraged those that have not yet signed and ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other relevant AU and international instruments to also do so without further delays;

Council and participant underlined the importance for Member States to develop comprehensive multi-stakeholder coordinated approaches for effectively ending child marriage. In this context, they underlined the importance of bringing on board such stakeholders such as community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders, government, law enforcement agencies, teachers, social workers, the private sector, civil society and the media. They also underscored the importance of public awareness campaigns on ending child marriage;

Council and participants commended the efforts being deployed by the AU Champion on Ending Child Marriage in Africa, H.E. President Edgar Chagwa Lungu of the Republic of Zambia, and encouraged all Member States to extend the necessary support to his efforts, with a view to ensuring the successful AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in the continent. In the same vein, they also commended the efforts of the ACERWC. They also commended the efforts being deployed by the AU Commission, particularly the sustained campaign to end child marriage throughout the African continent. They further commended all bilateral and multilateral partners for their continued support. They requested the AU Commission to expedite the development of a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism, in order to gauge the progress being made by Member States in implementing existing legal frameworks on ending child marriage;

Council and participants highlighted the fact that high level political engagement and action was critical in accelerating an end to child marriage in Africa;

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.