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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL 924TH MEETING 12 MAY 2020
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PSC/PR/COMM.(CMXXIV)

COMMUNIQUE

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Adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 924th meeting held on 12 May 2020, on the on the Impact of the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the security and welfare of children in Africa,

The Peace and Security Council,

Noting the opening remarks made by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho to the AU and PSC Chairperson for the month of May 2020, H.E. Ambassador Professor Mafa Sejanamane, as well as the presentations made by Dr Jane Marie Ongolo of the Department of Social Affairs of the AU Commission and by the Special Rapporteur on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts, Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur, as well as the update provided by the Deputy Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa-CDC), Dr Ahmed Ogwel Ouma;

Also noting the adverse effects of COVID-19 on the rights and welfare of children in Africa, including general child care and the right to education due to the closure of schools and that the introduction of online education platforms to facilitate distance learning increases the vulnerability of children to cyber-attacks and cybercrimes, as well as inappropriate content, including child pornography and online child sexual exploitation, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriages; and **further noting** all other unintended adverse consequences of prolonged closures of schools on the most vulnerable children, particularly girls and children living with disabilities, as well as those children who cannot afford distance learning tools such as computers or internet;

Mindful of the fact that, as Member States implement measures to contain and defeat the COVID-19 pandemic, significant attention and resources are diverted from other child protection and children-related public health services such as immunization and vaccination campaigns against other diseases; **also mindful** of the fact that the closure of schools due to the pandemic will inevitably affect the development of the human capital of children;

Acknowledging the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on children in conflict settings where access to basic social services is significantly limited, particularly, in camps hosting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs);

Recalling AU Assembly Decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.718 (XXXII)] adopted by the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Union, held from 10 to 12 February 2019, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which, among others, requested the Commission, in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to explore ways to strengthen the existing AU and Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs) mechanisms on child protection;

Also recalling all relevant AU and international instruments on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, particularly, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights in Africa, as well as Council's previous decisions and pronouncements on children, particularly Communiqué [PSC/PR/COMM. (CMXXII)], adopted at its 922nd meeting held on 6 May 2020; Press Statement [PSC/PR/BR.(DCCCXLI)], adopted at its 841st meeting held on 16 April 2019; Press

Statement [PSC/PR/BR. (DCCLVII)], adopted at its 757th meeting held on 13 March 2018; and Press Statement [PSC/PR/BR. (DCCVII)] adopted at its 706th meeting held 26 July 2017;

Acting under Article 7 of its Protocol, the Peace and Security Council:

1. **Commends** Member States for their relentless efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to mitigate its socio-economic impact and particularly for developing innovative means and ways of ensuring continuity of some basic public services including in the health and education sectors; and in this context, **pays tribute** to the teachers, social workers and health workers who continue to provide services to children in particularly challenging circumstances;
2. **Also commends** the efforts being deployed by the AU Commission through the Africa CDC in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and for providing regular updates to Council on the trend and progress in fighting the pandemic in the Continent;
3. **Further commends** Member States for introducing online education platforms with a view to ensuring continuity of education and **encourages** them to also consider nationwide educational radio programmes in all national official languages, and to also urgently develop innovative means and ways of ensuring continuity of supplementary feeding programmes for children in need;
4. **Encourages** Member States to adopt a comprehensive approach to healthcare and, in this context, to continue to pay attention and allocate adequate resources to ongoing public health programmes such as immunization and vaccination of children against other killer diseases, as well as to continue to give absolute priority to the most vulnerable children that are living in conflict situations, refugee and internally displaced children and children living with disabilities;
5. Stresses the importance of a collective commitment, national, regional, continental and international coordination which will make it possible for millions of African girls and boys, particularly children who have been uprooted by conflicts, children with disabilities, refugee children, children who are already living at the threshold of poverty and children exposed to violence, exploitation and ill-treatment, to benefit from social protection measures by intensifying the programmes and policies, which enable families to have access to vital health, nutrition and education services;
6. **Encourages** Member State to ensure that measures related to social distancing, quarantines, and lockdowns are child-friendly, with a view to reducing the vulnerabilities of children, particularly girls. In the same context, Council **also encourages** Member States to implement the Guiding Note that has been provided by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of Children during the response to COVID-19, as well as in the post COVID-19 era, in mitigating the long term impact of the pandemic on children;
7. **Condemns** child exploitation, crimes and abuses, including child marriages and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and **encourages** Member States to take stern measures against perpetrators and to end child marriages in line with the AU Campaign to End Child Marriages;

8. **Stresses the need** to implement the different relevant Continental and International normative frameworks relating to the rights and wellbeing of all children, including refugee and internally displaced children. Within this framework, Council **calls upon** all Member States, which have not yet done so, to sign and ratify and fully domesticate all the instruments of the African Union and other international instruments relating to the protection of children, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and

9. **Decides** to remain actively seized of the matter