

AFRICAN UNION

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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL 994TM MEETING 11 MAY 2021

ADDIS ABABA

PSC/PR/COMM. (CMXCIV)

COMMUNIQUE

Adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 994th meeting held on 11 May 2021, on the protection of children in conflict situations in Africa,

The Peace and Security Council,

Noting the opening remarks made by the Permanent Representative of People's Democratic Republic of Algeria and Chairperson of the PSC for May 2021, H.E Ambassador Salah Francis ELHAMDI, and the statements of the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, and the Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, H.E. Ambassador Amira El Fadil Mohammed Elfadil; **Also noting** the presentation made by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) Special Rapporteur for children affected by armed conflicts, H.E. Dr Robert Nanima; **further noting** the presentations providing an update on the state of children in situations of conflict in Africa made by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Director and the representative of Save the Children International;

Recalling its previous decisions and pronouncements on the impact of armed conflicts and crises on children in Africa, mainly Communiqués [PSC/PR/COMM.(CMLXV)] adopted at its 965th meeting held on 19 November 2020, [PSC/PR/COMM.(CMXXIV)] adopted at its 924th meeting held on 12 May 2020 and [PSC/MIN/COMM.2(DCLXI)] adopted at its 661st meeting at a ministerial-level held on 23 February 2017;

Concerned that the scourge of armed conflicts, in their various manifestations, in Africa continues to infringe on the liberties, the rights and the most basic needs of children with negative repercussions on their social and cognitive development, security, survival and wellbeing;

Encouraged by the AU Assembly Decision [Ext/Assembly/AU/Dec.I(XIV)] adopted during the 14th Extraordinary Session, which decided to "extend the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa for a period of ten years (2021-2030), with a periodic review every two years, within the context of Agenda 2063 for an Africa We Want";

Faithful to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which recognizes the significance of taking appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the African child and, in this aspect, **reiterating the fundamental importance** to the Charter's provisions and principles and the relevant Declarations and Assembly Decisions of the AU as well as the International Conventions on the rights and welfare of the child, and the broader human and people's rights;

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

1. **Takes note** of the recent study conducted by the ACERWC titled "*Stock take of the African Union Responses to Child Protection in Conflict Situations*", detailing areas of improvement for mainstreaming children's rights, protection, and wellbeing in all phases of armed conflict, from prevention efforts to mediation and recovery through sustainable, inclusive development within the African Union interventions; and **calls on** the ACERWC to develop a dissemination strategy to ensure that the Member States, Regional

Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs) and all relevant stakeholders are well apprised of the findings of the study;

2. **Expresses grave concerns** on the increase of armed conflicts in Africa adversely impacting children and violating their rights and welfare, in this regard, **calls on** all parties involved in armed conflict to unconditionally adhere to the AU and UN appeals for a global and continental ceasefire to ensure that children are protected from harm, and their rights are guaranteed; **and also calls on** all Member States in conflict situations to continuously take the necessary steps aimed at ensuring full compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL);

3. **Strongly condemns** the attacks on civilian objects and infrastructure, particularly schools and health facilities, which hinders the access of children to social services; **also strongly condemns** the illegal occupation of schools by armed non-state actors and use of these school facilities for military purposes infringing on the provision of social needs including access to education and health care; and **further condemns** the recurrence of abduction of students from schools, which inculcates a sense of insecurity and fear, and hinders access of children to places of learning, growth and cognitive development;

4. **Strongly deploras** the continued maiming and killing of children, their exposure to violations and abuses of their rights, the risks of being separated from their families, abducted, trafficked, sexually assaulted and mutilated, and also exposure to landmines, improvised explosive devices and recruitment by armed non-state groups, not only during armed conflict situations but also in contexts of Peace; and in this regard, **calls** for the Member States to double their efforts to investigate and prosecute all perpetrators of violations against children's rights and welfare followed by definitive punitive measures;

5. **Underscores** the imperative of concerted and holistic efforts to address the root causes and drivers of armed conflict; **and stresses** the need for concrete commitments supported by a strong political will, to actively and effectively address the political root causes, to pave the way for attaining and consolidating peace, which include the denial of the fundamental rights and respect for principles and obligations under the AU Constitutive Act;

6. **Expresses its deep concern** about the growing number and vulnerability of refugees and internally displaced children on the Continent **and emphasizes** the imperative of paying particular attention to and for prioritizing the plight of refugees and internally displaced children in conformity with the continental and international normative frameworks for children, refugees and Internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially during this period of COVID-19 pandemic; and, in this context, **commends** the substantial humanitarian assistance provided by all Member States that are currently hosting refugees and IDPs in their countries;

7. **Requests** the AU Commission to mobilize support for the Member States hosting refugees, IDPs and undocumented migrants, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in this regard, **underscores** the importance of ensuring that part of the AU COVID- 19 Response Fund, is directed towards the provision of humanitarian assistance to children among refugees and IDPs camps;

8. **Appeals** to the international community, specialized international agencies, civil society organizations and all relevant stakeholders to continue with efforts to assist children affected by armed conflict, particularly those in camps for refugees and IDPs, to have access to humanitarian assistance, education, food, social and health services and psychological care as part of redress efforts;

9. **Commends** the AU Member States who have ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other related international conventions concerning the children's rights and welfare; and in this aspect, **encourages** them to report progress on the implementation of these instruments; **also encourages** the Member States who are yet to sign, ratify and domesticate these relevant instruments to do so and take appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of an African child;

10. **Encourages** ACERWC to continue consulting and working closely with all stakeholders in armed conflict situations to establish a child protection situation room to enable timeous and closely coordinated responses towards protecting children affected by armed conflict;

11. **Requests** the AU Commission to institutionalize a child protection architecture within the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and develop policy aimed at mainstreaming child protection in all phases of intervention from conflict prevention and mediation to conflict management and **also requests** the AU Commission to integrate child protection in armed conflicts and in post conflicts situations in the AU Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD), **further requests** the AU Commission to finalize the drafting of the policy and submit to the PSC for its consideration;

12. **Further requests** the AU Commission to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, in a matrix format with clearly defined indicators, to assess progress made and

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highlight outstanding focus areas in the implementation of decisions adopted by the Assembly and Council relating to the protection of children affected by armed conflicts an, and ensure the efficacy of responses and efforts directed at addressing issues of children's rights and welfare protection in these settings;

13. **Reiterates its call** to the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint a Special Envoy on Children in Situations of Conflict pursuant to Assembly Decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.718(XXXII)] adopted during the 32nd Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government of the AU held in Addis Ababa from 10 — 11 February 2019, to ensure particular attention is paid to issues of children's rights and welfare in armed conflicts and crises in Africa; and **requests** the Chairperson of the Commission to mobilize requisite financial and human resources for the promotion of child protection in the continent;

14. **Looks forward** to the launching of the African Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (CAAC), without any additional financial implications and with the Membership of AU Permanent Representative to the AU in Addis Ababa, in May 2021, to keep the issues of child protection in armed conflict situations high on the agenda of the AU;

15. **Takes note** of the growing number of AU Member States who have signed and endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines as a non-binding framework assisting States in undertaking their respective obligations under international law, **and looks forward** to the upcoming 4th International Conference on Safe Schools to be hosted by the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria scheduled for 25 to 27 October 2021, and **takes note** of the invitation by Nigeria for the AU Commission to co-host the Conference;

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