



INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No:

Date: 12 January 2025

Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Statement by the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP-CAAC) on the International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers

Today, the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP-CAAC) joins the global community in commemorating the International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers, also known as Red Hand Day.

This day serves as a solemn reminder of the plight of countless African children forcibly recruited and used in armed conflicts. It underscores the urgent need for collective action to protect their rights and ensure their well-being.

The recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts is a grave violation of human rights and a profound affront to human dignity. Across Africa, children are stripped of their childhood and thrust into the brutal realities of war. They are forced into combat and exploited as messengers, porters, spies, and political pawns, with many enduring the horrors of sexual violence, particularly girls who face heightened vulnerabilities. These children are robbed of their innocence, education, and future, leaving them with lifelong scars and depriving their communities of the children's potential contributions.

Despite these challenges, significant progress has been made in addressing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. The African Union and its Member States work tirelessly to advocate for the rights of children in conflict situations and to support rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. These efforts have yielded results, including rehabilitation programmes that provide children formerly associated with armed conflicts with access to education, healthcare, psychosocial support, and vocational training. Advocacy and awareness campaigns have strengthened the commitment of Member States to protect children, while child protection frameworks, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child emphasise the prevention of child recruitment and the reintegration of affected children.

While progress is evident, the fight to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts is far from over. Ongoing conflicts, poverty, lack of education, and political instability continue to create environments where children remain vulnerable to exploitation. The AP-CAAC calls on Member States and all stakeholders to redouble efforts to protect children by strengthening legal frameworks, holding perpetrators accountable, and investing in sustainable disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes that are child-friendly, trauma-informed, and tailored to the unique needs of boys and girls. Addressing the root causes of child recruitment requires investment in economic development, food security, and conflict prevention. Stronger collaboration among governments, international organisations, civil society, and local communities is essential to create a unified and effective response to the challenges faced by children in conflict situations.

As we observe this day, we are reminded of our shared responsibility to protect Africa's children from the tragedies of armed conflict. The AP-CAAC reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding the rights of every child and ensuring they grow up in a safe, secure, and peaceful environment that nurtures their dreams and aspirations.

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