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**THE AFRICA AMNESTY MONTH CONTINENTAL DIALOGUE TOWARDS ACHIEVING  
THE GOAL OF SILENCING THE GUNS IN AFRICA BY 2030**

**22 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**REMARKS BY**

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- **Excellencies Ambassadors and Heads of Missions of AU Member States**
- **Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms**
- **Representatives of the United Nations and International Organizations**
- **Representative of the Institute for Security Studies**
- **Esteemed Partners**
- **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am delighted to speak to you this morning at this first initiative of its kind, as we meet as Embassies and Missions of AU Member States, the Regional Economic Communities, the United Nations, Partners and civil society, to exchange views and share experiences on the implementation of the African Amnesty Month.

As you may recall, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, at its 29<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa in July 2017, on the Inaugural Report of the Peace and Security Council on the Implementation of the **AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by the year 2020**, adopted a decision in which it declared the month of September of each year, till 2020, as the **“Africa Amnesty Month” for the surrender and collection of illegally owned weapons/arms**. The duration of the Amnesty Month was subsequently extended for up to 2030 by the 14<sup>th</sup> Extra-Ordinary Session of the Assembly on Silencing the Guns that was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in December 2020.

The decision says that “persons who surrender their illegally owned weapons/arms shall not be subjected to disclosure humiliation, arrest or prosecution. Also, that *“persons who fail to surrender their illegally owned weapons/arms beyond the Africa Amnesty month, shall automatically be considered to be in violation of national laws and the Amnesty and shall therefore be prosecuted according to the national laws of the Member States”*”.

Further to that, the decision calls on all Member States, the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), as well as civil society organizations to give wide publicity, through all media networks, to the Africa Amnesty Month within their territories and regions. Member States are also requested to adhere to and promote the Africa Amnesty Month, during the September of each year, and to mobilize their citizens to actively participate in the efforts to silence the guns.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The widespread availability of illicit firearms among civilians in the Continent continues to contribute to the high levels of armed violence, including gender based violence which have adverse effects on human and state security and efforts to consolidate democratic governance in our member states. These weapons also fuel criminal violence like armed robberies, inter-communal violence, insurgencies, and terrorism.

The report of the study conducted by the African Union Commission in partnership with the Small Arms Survey, released in 2019, before the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, indicated that there is an estimated 40 million small arms and light weapons in the African continent. Of these, the armed forces and law enforcement agencies own about 11 million, while about 5.8 million are officially registered. This leaves over 16 million weapons as unregistered.

From this estimate , we see that the success in silencing the guns depends on our collective ability to withdraw these illicit weapons from the possession of unauthorized individuals. This is a daunting task! The Africa Amnesty Month is one of the continental programs that seeks to contribute to these efforts.

You will agree with me that voluntary disarmament is not new to the Continent, and there is a wealth of experience available at the national level on its effectiveness in removing illicit arms from the possession of civilians. Such programs have included confidence building initiatives between the state and its citizens. Whereas these initiatives have encountered some challenges, they nonetheless remain a foundational basis for the implementation of the Africa Amnesty Month.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Allow me to thank you as Member States, for the commitment you have demonstrated by commemorating the Africa Amnesty Month consistently from the time the Assembly made the declaration.

The Commission, including in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), has been providing technical and modest financial support to some Member States, upon request, to implement some activities during the Amnesty Month. We will have opportunity to hear from some of these Member States and their experiences in implementing these activities.

However, it is important to note that weak national legislation to control and regulate civilian possession of firearms, or the poor enforcement thereof, remains a significant gap for some Member States. This is one of the areas in which the African Union Commission, working with the RECs, the UN and partners, is providing support to Member States.

It is also noted that reporting by Member States on activities undertaken during the Africa Amnesty Month has been poor. Consequently, the report of the Commission to the Summits on the commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month have lacked the nuances that they deserve. In order to address this, and as directed by the Peace and Security Council at its 1105<sup>th</sup> meeting held in Lomé, Togo, on 15 September 2022, the AU Commission is developing a reporting and monitoring template, which will enable systematic and standardized reporting on activities undertaken by Member States.

On the other hand, and to ensure coherent national planning for and coordination in the implementation of activities, the Commission, working with the RECs is also developing guidelines for Member States to develop National action plans.

The Commission had worked with the RECs to develop Regional Chapters of the Silencing the Guns Plans of Action in the area of arms control. We commit to renewing efforts to revise and update these plans of action , and engage with the Member States of the regions to validate them.

As I conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to reiterate the commitment of the African Union Commission to strengthen cooperation and collaboration with the RECs and RMs, the UN, Partners, Think Tanks, the media and all stakeholders in supporting the efforts of Member States to implement the aspirations of the Africa Amnesty Month. We count on the continued commitment of the Member States in order for these collective efforts to bear fruit.

It is my sincere hope that we will have candid exchange of views and experiences in implementing the Africa Amnesty Month that will enable us to improve each year, for the next eight years, until the 2030 target.

I thank you for your kind attention.