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**OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI, COMMISSIONER FOR  
PEACE AND SECURITY  
AT THE LAUNCH OF YOUTH SILENCING THE GUNS CAMPAIGN**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,  
24 July 2020**

**Distinguished Colleagues and Panelists,  
My daughters and sons across the continent,**

I am elated to deliver this address to officially launch the campaign for the mobilization and support for African young women and men towards silencing the guns in Africa and to advance peace efforts on the Continent.

Indeed, the Commission through the Peace and Security Department's (PSD) Youth for Peace Africa program primarily has been working relentlessly to promote youth participation in peace and security in line with the decisions of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government as well as the Peace and Security Council (PSC). This includes implementation of Article 17 of the Africa Youth Charter and UNSCR 2250 and 2419; institutionalization of the Youth for Peace Africa program in the PSD; dedication of an annual PSC open session on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS); appointment of five regional African Youth Ambassadors for Peace; and most recently, the PSC's adoption of the Continental Framework on YPS and endorsement of study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to peace and security in Africa.

In adopting "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Environment for Africa's Development" as the theme of the year 2020, the African Union (AU) policy organs intended to emphasize the nexus between peace and development. The theme coincides with the deadline set by the Assembly of the Union, in its Solemn Declaration, adopted on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU, *"to rid the continent of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters and violent conflicts and to prevent genocide"*. Year 2020, therefore, is a landmark as it sets out the necessary conditions for creating a conducive environment to move forward Africa's development agenda. African citizens and communities, in particular Youth, have raised expectations regarding the fulfillment of the objectives of year 2020.

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Whereas, several factors and stakeholders instigate and sustain violence, the youth are often perceived as the harbingers of violence. One of the core objectives of the Youth for Peace Africa program is to debunk the negative stereotyping of young Africans while showcasing their positive contributions and fostering partnerships with them as agents of social change, cohesion, peace and development. Silencing the guns is not just about the physical weapons but also about exclusion, marginalization, poverty and unemployment, among others, as captured in the AU Master Roadmap for Silencing the Guns. In this context, the Peace and Security Department in collaboration with the RECs/RMs shall be supporting five regional projects to be implemented by

the Africa youth ambassadors for peace. We have strongly encouraged the youth ambassadors for peace to broadly engage the youth in their regions in the development and implementation of these projects to foster ownership but most importantly, respond to the peace and security challenges in the regions.

In contemporary times, the Youth, Peace and Security agenda has gained continental and global momentum occasioned by the PSC's adoption of the Continental YPS Framework and its 10-year implementation plan; endorsement of the study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa as well as the UNSC adoption of Resolution 2535. The continental framework, which was jointly developed with the RECs/RMs and youth provides the normative guidance to all relevant stakeholders for the non-tokenistic mainstreaming and consequential inclusion of youth in all spheres of peacebuilding across five priorities of participation, prevention, protection, partnership and coordination as well as disengagement and reintegration. It envisions the mainstreaming of crosscutting issues including gender, capacity building, inclusivity, communication and knowledge management. Also, the UNSCR 2535 reiterates the clarion call to Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in peacebuilding as well as promotes their protection.

Similarly, the UNSCR 2457 supporting the African Union's vision to silence the guns in Africa, also encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the needs of youth affected by armed conflict, including the problem of youth unemployment in the continent, by investing in building young person's capabilities and skills to meet labor demands through relevant education opportunities designed in a manner which promotes a culture of peace;

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The continental study aptly captures the immense contributions of youth to peace and security including in prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts, governance and electioneering process, preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, climate change, gender equality etc. In the coming weeks, the AU and RECs/RMs shall be organizing series of webinars to disseminate and popularize the contents of the framework and the findings of the study. I urge you all to read and familiarize yourselves with the Continental YPS Framework in order to drive its domestication and implementation. The youth as the primary implementers and beneficiaries of the YPS agenda must take advantage of the continental and global momentum and be at the leading edge of the constantly evolving youth sector in general, and particularly in peace and security. You need to take note of norms and institutional arrangements, which are fast evolving, and find innovative ways to adapt to them.

***My daughters and sons across the continent,***

I reiterate my commitment and that of my team to ensure your meaningful participation by creating conducive platforms to utilize your enormous energies and capacities for the promotion of peace and stability in Africa within the framework of the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps

to Silence the Guns in Africa. We shall continue to do this through diverse existing platforms such as capacity building including training, mentorship, and intergenerational dialogues as well as utilize the regional and continental networks of young peacebuilders to facilitate regular engagements between the AU, RECs/RMs and youth, experience sharing and peer learning. Further, we shall also adopt creative and interactive platforms including social and mainstream media to engage youth on the STG agenda. In recent times, the webinars organized such as the High-Level Africa Day Conference Series on STG, brought to the fore rich perspectives and contributions of youth to peace and human security especially resilience and responses in the context of COVID-19. Noteworthy is the myriad contributions of young peacebuilders including provision of socio-economic palliatives to vulnerable households during enforced lockdowns and sensitization campaigns on personal health hygiene to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Further to this, the youth should be part of the governance mechanism, economic development from the Member States level, RECs/RMs and to the AU since most of them are the ones at the front line of the extremism groups. Regional and national bodies should integrate peace efforts by youth into the existing peace and security programs and make use of non-tech solutions to ensure the youth in the rural areas are not left behind.

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I wish to underscore that silencing the guns will be a mirage without the effective inclusion, meaningful engagement and contributions of youth, the most potent population on the continent. Once again, I reiterate my determination and dedication to create and enable safe spaces for your strategic engagement and contributions as we strive collectively to rid the continent of conflicts and foster its sustainable development. I am therefore delighted to officially launch the Youth Silencing the Guns Campaign with the major objective of mobilizing and advancing the enormous efforts of youth for the implementation of the STG agenda. In this context, the PSD in collaboration with, relevant AUC departments, RECs/RMs and the five African Youth Ambassadors for Peace shall utilize virtually creative, appealing and rewarding (CAR) approach to engage the continent's youth on the campaign. Some envisaged activities include but not limited to RECs/RMs hosted regional consultations to ascertain specific roles that youth can play to contribute to the STG agenda; bi-monthly social media sensitization campaigns on AUMR; capacity building programmes; technical and financial support for youth-led and oriented projects with focus on creating conditions for the employment of young people etc.

I look forward to engage with you all to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa.

I thank you for your kind attention.