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COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

21 September 2020

“Youth as Agents for Silencing the Guns and Shaping Peace in Africa”

I. INTRODUCTION

The International Day of Peace will be commemorated on 21 September 2020, providing humanity with the opportunity to commit to Peace above all differences and to contribute to promoting a Culture of Peace with the theme, “Shaping Peace Together”. The African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 provides the vision and aspirations for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. To further these aspirations, the AU Heads of State and Government dedicated the year 2020 to the theme, “Silencing the guns; creating conducive conditions for Africa’s Development.”

However, these aspirations are often threatened by different factors such as poverty and unemployment in spite of the abundance of enormous natural resources to create wealth and employment opportunities for citizens. In the past years, agitations and desperations for enhanced living conditions have instigated criminal and violent actions resulting in loss of lives, destruction of properties and livelihood opportunities as well displacement of millions of people within and outside national boundaries. In contemporary times, the upsurge and rapid spread of violent extremism has considerably changed the human security, peace and stability dynamics on the continent given the intensity and frequency of violence in territories of tenacious concerns and gradual infiltration to other countries. Consequently, criminal networks and violent extremist groups operating on the continent have capitalized on the

structural vulnerabilities of the population to propagate their ideology and recruit people including youth into their ranks. Cognizant of the need to transform the myriad issues that threaten peace and security, various policy frameworks such as the AU Constitutive Act and the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) provide for inclusivity in dealing with conflict and ensuring peace.

Africa has the youngest and fastest growing population in the world. Estimated at 60%, the youth demographic of the continent if adequately harnessed poses great potentials for the actualization of the AU vision. It is in this context, that the AU adopted the African Youth Charter (AYC) in July 2006 to foster youth inclusivity in the actualization of the continent's aspirations. Specifically, Article 17 of the AYC encourages the meaningful participation of youth in peace and security across seven broad areas which resonates with the five pillars of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, which was adopted in December 2015, and subsequent UNSCR resolutions including 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020). These policy instruments pave the way for the development of concrete youth-centered policies and programmes aimed at contributing to the elimination of stereotypes against youth and also advocating for their increased participation and representation in peacebuilding. Within this context, the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission in collaboration with the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) will commemorate the International Day of Peace (Peace Day) 2020 on the theme "Youth as Agents for Silencing the Guns and Shaping Peace in Africa".

II. RATIONALE

Young Africans are often perceived as violent due to the involvement of a small fraction of them in violent conflict, unrest and crime, with limited recognition and appreciation for the immense roles played by a majority of them to tackle vulnerabilities, promote peace, resilience and social cohesion. However, in recent times, the AU and UN have embraced a paradigm shift by recognizing youth contributions to peacebuilding and encouraging the meaningful participation of youth as social agents for peace. In this regard, the AUC's Peace and Security Department (PSD) launched the Youth for Peace Africa Program in September 2018 with the primary objective of facilitating the meaningful participation of youth at all levels of peacebuilding in Africa. The program advocated and secured the inaugural open session of the PSC on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in November 2018. In recognition of the contributions of youth to peace and security, the PSC in its 807th communiqué of 8th November 2018 requested the Commission to conduct a study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa as well as finalize the development of a continental framework on youth, peace and security.

In recognition of the important roles and contributions of African youth in the

promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, within the framework of the AU Master Roadmap (AUMR) of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa and the afore mentioned AU and UN policies, the PSC at its 933rd meeting of 23rd June 2020 endorsed the study report and adopted the Continental YPS Framework and its 10-year implementation plan. The study report highlights the diverse contributions by youth to peace and security despite enormous challenges and proffers policy and programmatic recommendations to enhance youth related interventions in preventing and responding to conflict. The Continental YPS Framework provides the normative guidance to youth, Member States and RECs/RMs for the development and implementation of youth-centered and led strategic plans of actions to ensure the inclusivity of youth at policy design, implementation and monitoring of peacebuilding interventions.

In the past years, various actions have been taken by several stakeholders including the UN, AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs), Member States and Civil Society groups etc. to create awareness, as well as promote social cohesion, dialogue and tolerance with a focus on the important roles that youth can play in these processes. Considering contemporary developments on the continent, including the COVID- 19 pandemic and its serious impact globally and in Africa, the global economic crisis and climate change, it can be expected that the social-economic and political challenges will increase, with specific impact on the youth. It is necessary to approach these challenges with renewed emphasis on the youth, especially with a focus on how they can be involved in preventing conflict and sustaining peace. It is therefore essential that all stakeholders and partners have a common understanding as well as enhance synergy, coordination, collaboration and complementarity in programmes and processes, not only to empower the youth but also to ensure their meaningful participation in the implementation of the Continental YPS Framework and its 10-year implementation plan.

III. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

In commemoration of the Peace Day on 21st September 2020, the AU-PSD, in partnership with the UNOAU and IPSS will organize a webinar with the goal to engage “Youth as agents for Silencing the Guns and Shaping Peace in Africa” within the context of the YPS Framework and its implementation plan.

The objectives of the webinar will be to:

- Disseminate the Continental YPS Framework and findings of the Study Report on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa;
- Promote a platform for shared understanding between diverse stakeholders for collaboration, coordination and complementarity on the implementation of the Continental YPS Framework;
- Elicit recommendations on key strategies to facilitate the domestication and implementation of YPS Framework.

IV.EXPECTED OUTPUT

- Creation of a common understanding on the Continental YPS Framework and the Study Report amongst participants;
- Creation of partner's/stakeholder's platform for collaboration, coordination and complementarity on the implementation of the YPS Framework;
- Webinar report as a record of discussions and ideas for future development of strategies to domesticate and implement the YPS Framework

V.PARTICIPANT AND METHODOLOGY

The webinar shall be organized via dedicated AU virtual links with simultaneous interpretation in four AU official languages. Participants at the webinar shall be drawn from the AU Youth for Peace Africa network, Member States, RECs/RMs, UN, AUC, research organizations and other partners. It shall adopt a participatory approach with presentations on the findings of the Study Report and the Continental YPS Framework. This will be followed by panel discussions on thematic areas with comments and recommendations from panelists on how to implement the YPS Framework, as well as interactive question and answer sessions. The event will also serve as a platform to launch the youth-led peace-themed song, which seeks to mobilize youth on the continent to shape peace together and silence the guns.