

**LEVERAGING THE ARTS TO SILENCE THE GUNS**

**VIRTUAL TRAINING OF AFRICAN ARTISTS: 18 – 22 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR H.E MOHAMED IBN CHAMBAS, THE AU HIGH  
REPRESENTATIVE FOR SILENCING THE GUNS IN AFRICA**

**Mr. Evariste Karambizi, the Director of the Division for Peace at UNITAR,**

**Colleagues from the African Union Commission,**

**Participants,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**Good morning,**

1. I would like to welcome you all to this training on Silencing the Guns, whose aim is to promote wider ownership of the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative.
2. We are particularly delighted to be holding this training for selected and renowned African artists from across Africa, in recognition of the effective role that you play in the peace and governance processes at national, regional and continental levels. In this regard, I would like to recognize your immense power and influence, in engaging the masses, including in underserved regions of Africa.

3. Thus, the need to leverage your strengths in the promotion of democracy, good governance, sustainable peace, security and development - factors which are vital in silencing the guns on the continent. As artists, you have the power to not only bring people together, but also inspire a sense of community.
4. By way of background. In December, 2021 in Accra, Ghana, the Silencing the Guns Unit organized a continental seminar on “Art, Culture and Heritage, as Levers to Silence the Guns in Africa”, with the aim of sensitizing African Artists on the importance of promoting a culture of peace.
5. By the end of the 3-day seminar, the artists were fully engaged and eager to support country-level interventions to silence the guns. That was the beginning of our blossoming collaboration with African artists.
6. It is therefore an honor for us to bring together yet another cohort of African Artists, this time for more incisive engagement and interaction over the next 5-days.

7. This training comes at a critical moment when the continent is commemorating Africa Amnesty Month, one of the vital steps of the AU Master Roadmap to Silence the Guns in Africa. As some of you may be aware, in the month of September every year, African Union Member States observe Africa Amnesty Month, by allowing civilians to voluntarily surrender illicit small arms and light weapons in their possession to national authorities in return for Amnesty. This is one of the most effective ways of reducing the proliferation of illicit arms in the continent.
  
8. To put this into perspective, in 2019, the African Union commissioned a study to map illicit arms flow in Africa. The findings indicated that civilian actors in the continent and non-state armed groups, hold more than 40 million—or almost 80 per cent—of all small arms on the continent. Of the 40 million civilian-held firearms, only 5.8 million are recorded as being officially registered, while 16 million are unregistered.
  
9. This scenario stresses the importance of implementing the Africa Amnesty month by all Member States, and to develop interventions that will encourage civilians to cooperate with governments and surrender their illegal weapons. The African Union considers you a valuable partner in our efforts to combat illicit arms in the continent.

10. In this regard, we look forward to your support in heightening awareness on the negative impact such weapons on the continent of Africa, and encourage African citizens in possession of illicit arms to surrender them to designated authorities without prosecution.
  
11. Ladies and gentlemen. The Silencing the Guns initiative actualizes a pledge by our Heads of State and Government, which was adopted by the AU Assembly on 25 May 2013, “not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans”, and thereby undertaking to end all wars in Africa. While achieving the goal of silencing the goals has experienced setbacks due to the complex nature of security challenges, it is incumbent upon us to redouble our efforts towards achieving lasting peace.
  
12. We hope that at the end of the 5-day training, we will have on board more peace champions/advocates with a deeper understanding on how we can, together, contribute to a cohesive society, through conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation.
  
13. Lastly, I would like to thank, immensely, our partners, the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), for collaborating with us in designing this training. The United Nations remains African Union’s biggest partner in the search for peace and security, under the guidance of the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, signed in April 2017.

14. As stipulated in the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa , a multi-stakeholder approach to institutional cooperation to silence the guns in the continent is critical in accelerating tangible results to end conflict, and so is deepening strategic partnerships to promote harmonized approaches to prevent, mitigate conflict and build peace, post conflict.

15. In conclusion, I would like to wish you all a successful training. We look forward to our continued relationship in order to heighten public awareness and consciousness about silencing the guns and hope that you will use the skills you acquire from this training, to educate, disseminate/share appropriate messaging and advocacy on Silencing the guns.

16. I thank you!