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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

965TH MEETING

19 NOVEMBER 2020

ADDIS ABABA

PSC/PR/COMM. (CMLXV)

COMMUNIQUE

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Adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 965th meeting held on 19 November 2020, on the protection of children in conflict situations in Africa,

The Peace and Security Council,

Noting the opening remarks made by the Permanent Representative of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for November 2020, H.E. Ambassador Tesfaye Yilma, and the statements of the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, H.E. Ambassador Ms. Amira El Fadil Mohammed Elfadil and the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Smail Chergui, read by the Director for Peace and Security, Dr Admore Kambudzi; ***also noting*** the presentation made by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) Special Rapporteur, Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur; ***further noting*** the presentations providing an update on the state of children in situations of conflict in Africa made by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative to the AU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Dr. Edward Addai, the Deputy Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Valery Mbaoh Nana and the Save the Children Director and Representative to the AU, Ms. Doris Mpoumou;

Recalling the Executive Council Decision [EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI)] adopted during the 21st Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa from 9 to 13 July 2012, wherein it requested the PSC to take into account the rights of children in its agenda and cooperate actively with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), in its efforts aimed at promoting the welfare of children in Africa;

Also recalling its previous decisions and pronouncements on the impact of armed conflicts and crises on children in Africa, particularly, Communiques [PSC/PR/COMM.(CMXXIV)] adopted at its 924th meeting held on 12 May 2020 and [PSC/MIN/COMM.2(DCLXI)] adopted at its 661st meeting at a ministerial-level held on 23 February 2017, and Press Statements [PSC/PR/BR.(DCCCXLI)] adopted at its 841st meeting held on 16 April 2019, [PSC/PR/BR.(DCCLVII)] adopted at its 757th meeting held on 13 March 2018, [PSC/PR/BR.(DCCVI)] adopted at its 706th meeting held on 26 July 2017, [PSC/PR/BR.(DXCVII)] adopted at its 597th meeting held on 10 May 2016;

Inspired by the AU Theme of the year 2020 on Silencing the Guns – Creating conducive conditions for Africa's development and, Aspirations 3 and 4 of the AU Agenda 2063;

Faithful to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which recognizes the significance of taking appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of

an African child and in this aspect, **reiterating its adherence** to its provisions, and principles contained in the Assembly Declarations and Decisions of the AU as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Acting under Article 7 of its Protocol, the Peace and Security Council:

1. **Takes note** of the recently adopted ACERWC General Comment on Article 22 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: Children in situations of Conflicts, which serves as a tool for normative guidance to Member States in relation to their respective obligations towards children protection in the context of armed conflict in Africa in accordance with international Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law; and **welcomes**, in particular, raising the age of recruitment in the army in line with the respective obligations under international law;
2. **Acknowledges** the increasingly asymmetrical nature of armed conflicts on the Continent, particularly the rise of violent extremism and terrorist attacks, as well as emerging unconventional threats to peace and security in the Continent resulting in increased vulnerability of children to displacement, separation from their parents, families and communities, exploitation and other forms infringing on their rights and welfare; **calls on** parties to conflict to unconditionally adhere to the AU and UN appeals for ceasefire to create corridors for efforts to assist those doubly affected by persistent conflicts and the novel coronavirus pandemic;
3. **Expresses grave concern** over the adverse impact of armed conflict on children's personal, social and cognitive development, as evidenced by continued violations and abuses of their rights, as well as violence perpetrated against them including gender-based violence, forced marriages, child labour exploitation, recruitment as child soldiers and armed militias, which further erodes their welfare, deprive them of their human dignity and agency towards the development of the Continent; **also expresses concern** over the radicalization of children, who in the process may also be recruited as suicide bombers by terrorist groups;
4. **Strongly condemns** the recruitment of child soldiers, armed militias and the use of children as suicide bombers in the Continent; and **calls** for the Member States to double their efforts to investigate and prosecute all violations against children's rights and welfare followed by effective punitive measures against all perpetrators without fear, favor and prejudice;
5. **Also strongly condemns** the attacks on civilian populations and properties, particularly schools and health facilities which hinders the access of children to education and healthcare services; **further strongly condemns** the unlawful occupation of schools by armed actors and use

of these school facilities for military purposes infringing on the provision of social needs and a healthy environment for children and the broader society;

6. **Deplores** the continued grave violations in the Continent, including the denial of humanitarian access which is crucial in armed conflict settings to alleviate the suffering of the affected populations including children; in this regard, **appeals** to the Member to facilitate access and provision of humanitarian assistance to children affected by armed conflict;

7. **Stresses** the imperative need to make concrete commitments supported by a strong political will to actively and effectively address the political root causes of armed conflicts on the Continent, which include the denial of the fundamental rights and respect for principles and obligations under the AU Constitutive Act;

8. **Underscores** the imperative of including efforts aimed at alleviating the plight of children in situations of armed conflict, in the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by the Year 2020; and in this regard **emphasizes** the need to create a robust follow up and evaluation framework in a matrix format for assessing progress made and outstanding focus areas to enhance the implementation of decisions adopted for the protection of children affected by conflicts and crises;

9. **Expresses its deep concern** about the growing number and vulnerability of refugee and displaced children on the Continent and **calls for** the need to give particular priority to refugee and displaced children in conformity with the continental and international normative frameworks for children, refugees and displaced persons;

10. **Underlines** the importance of institutionalizing a child protection architecture in efforts towards promoting peace in conflict settings and countries emerging from conflict to amplify children's voices, prevent the stigmatization of children affected by armed conflict and treating them as threats instead of victims; in this regard **calls** for concerted efforts to include children in deradicalization as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts; **underscores** the importance of prioritizing education and access to schools in Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) efforts, in recognition that education is crucial in achieving Agenda 2063 and reaching the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

11. **Underlines also** the importance of optimal utilization of the existing instruments and mechanisms to fit the purpose, ensuring synergy through synchronization of these instruments and facilitation of effective implementation; in this regard, **highlights** the need for ACERWC to work closely with the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) with a view to contributing to the promotion and protection on human right in the Continent;

12. **Takes note** of the Member States who have signed, ratified and domesticated the AU instruments and other related international conventions concerning the children's rights and welfare; and in this regard, **encourages** Member States who are yet to do so, to consider signing, ratifying and domesticating relevant AU instruments to ensure that children in armed conflicts are shielded from their adverse impact and their rights and welfare are protected;
13. **Underlines** the importance of sharing experiences on the normative frameworks and policies adopted at the national level, as well as best practices and considerations aimed at closing the gaps in terms of implementation, monitoring and evaluation to ensure the efficacy of responses and efforts directed at addressing issues of children's rights and welfare protection in conflict settings;
14. **Looks forward** to the 12th International Conference on Children which will be held in Abuja, Nigeria in 2021;
15. **Reiterates its call** to the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint a Special Envoy on Children in Situations of Conflict per Assembly Decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.718(XXXII)] adopted during the 32nd Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government of the AU held in Addis Ababa from 10 – 11 February 2019, to ensure particular attention is paid to issues of children's rights and welfare in conflicts and crises in Africa;
16. **Decides** to dedicate two sessions each year to receive briefings by ACERWC and related partners on the plight of children in armed conflicts and crises in the Continent, and progress made in the implementation of past decisions;
17. **Decides** to remain actively seized of the matter.