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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 5513 822 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321
Email: situationroom@africa-union.org

PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

597TH MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

10 MAY 2016

PSC/PR/BR.(DXCVII)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), held its 597th meeting on 10 May 2016, which was dedicated to an open session on the theme: “Children in Armed Conflicts in Africa with particular focus on protecting schools from attacks during armed conflict”.

Council received statements from Ambassador Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security; Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs and Madam Bineta Diop, AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security. Council received presentations from Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur (Chairperson of African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC); Madam Leila Zerrougui (the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflicts); Ms. Leila Pakkala, (UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa); Madam Doris Mpoumou (Director of Save the Children International and Representative to the African Union); as well as General Romeo Dallaire (Director and Founder of Child Soldiers Initiative). Statements were also received from representatives of AU Member States, bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as civil society organizations.

Council further recalled all its previous decisions and pronouncements on the plight of children in armed conflicts, particularly, Press Statement [PSC/PR/BR. (CDXCI)] adopted at its 491st meeting, open session, held on 9 March 2015 and Press Statement [PSC/PR/BR.(CDXXXIV)] adopted at its 434th meeting, open session, held on 8 December 2014. Council also recalled United Nations Security Council resolutions 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015) in which the Security Council expressed deep concern at the military use of schools and subsequently called on all Member States to consider “concrete measures” to deter this practice.

Council expressed deep concern over the continuing violations of children’s rights and violence perpetrated against children, including sexual violence, attacks against schools, as well as wanton destruction of educational infrastructure, not only during situations of armed conflicts, but also during times of peace.

Council called for concerted efforts in preventing violations of children’s rights and the need for AU Member States to take robust punitive measures against all perpetrators of violations and abuses against children, particularly, sexual violations.

Council noted with serious concern that despite African and global engagements towards the protection of children affected by armed conflict and the progress achieved to strengthen the existing legal frameworks, grave violations of children’s rights still continue in most African countries affected by conflicts. Council also noted with concern, the weak and slow implementation of existing AU and international legal instruments relating to protection of children’s rights. In this regard, Council underscored the need for all Member States to mainstream the protection of children, educational infrastructure and personnel in their public administration and management systems.

Council emphasized the primary responsibility of governments of the Member States in ensuring that children are protected and that their rights and welfare are promoted. In this regard, Council urged all AU Member States, which have not yet done so, to sign, ratify and fully

domesticate all AU and other relevant international child protection, rights and welfare instruments, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as the Malabo Protocol, which mandates the African Court on Human and People's Rights to also handle the crime of rape, which the Protocol includes in its definition of what constitutes a genocide.

Council called on all Member States in conflict situations to comply with International Humanitarian law and to ensure that schools are not used for military purposes. In this context, Council welcomed the initiatives taken by some Member States to promote and protect the right of children to education and to facilitate the continuation of education in situations of armed conflicts. In this respect, Council commended the fifteen (15) AU Member States, namely, the Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan and Zambia, which have already endorsed the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflicts, also popularly known as the "Safe Schools Guidelines" and urged all the other AU Member States, which have not yet done so, to also endorse these Guidelines. In the same context, Council underscored the need to further strengthen the Guidelines in order to ensure that they are applicable to all situations and circumstances.

Council reiterated its recommendation for the appointment of an AU Special Envoy for Children in Africa, in order to sustain its efforts in protecting children's rights in the continent, particularly in the context of armed conflicts.

Council emphasized the need for the Commission to ensure that the Report of the PSC on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa, which is always submitted to the ordinary sessions of the AU Assembly, in line with Article 7 (q) of the PSC Protocol, should always dedicate a section on children in armed conflicts. In the same context, Council requested the Commission to include, as part of the Report of the PSC on Its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa, to be submitted to the next ordinary session of the AU Assembly to be held in July 2016, in Kigali, Rwanda, a section dedicated to the plight of children in armed conflicts and other situations in the continent.

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.

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