



**STATEMENT BY H.E AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI,
COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
ON CONFLICT PREVENTION: A MECHANISM TO CURB
FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA
PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT
MIDRAND, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Mr. Speaker,
Honorable Members of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP)**

1. I would like to thank the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) for inviting me to brief this important organ of the African Union on “Conflict Prevention: A Mechanism to Curb related Forced Displacement in Africa” to frame and underscore the “Role of the Pan-African Parliament in achieving durable solutions to forced displacement in Africa. This is in line with the AU theme for 2019: “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement”.

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2. According to the United Nations, Africa is home to nearly a third of the world’s refugee and internally displaced persons while four African countries, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia are among the top countries in the world hosting refugees- a result of both natural and man-made causes. The former includes the growing scarcity and mismanagement of natural resources and vulnerability to natural disasters linked to climate change. The impact of increased environmental degradation threatens conflict in the short- term and increased forced displacement in the long term.

3. Forced displacement is further driven by man-made factors in the realm of governance such lack of inclusivity, unequal distribution of resources and impunity. Such shortcomings have created space for religious extremism, resource related conflicts, intra-state, external interference and desperation amongst African youth who risk everything in search of a better life. The more than 2200 deaths in the Mediterranean route in 2018 is a testimony to this. The governance deficits are also responsible for a resurgence of intra-state conflicts.

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4. Change is happening in Africa. It’s a tale of two stories. There are positive developments in many of our Member States with the potential to contribute to political and socio-economic stability. These include the growing occurrences of scheduled and peaceful elections; and, the resolution of conflict situations. However, there have also been increasing serious threats to peace and security that have contributed to forced displacement.

5. On the positive side, the recent peaceful elections in Nigeria, Senegal, DRC, Mali and Madagascar, despite tensions related to the processes, are a testament to political maturity and tolerance in our Member States. The limited violent contestations that surrounded these elections have posed less risk to national stability, a contributing factor to forced displacement.

6. The guns are falling silent in many corners of our continent. The 20-year conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is over. Border crossings between the two countries were formally opened in September 2018. In the Central African Republic, the signing of a peace agreement on 6th February 2019 led by the AU with UN support and the rapid progress in the implementation of the agreement has revived chances for reconciliation, justice and stability. In South Sudan, despite some challenges, the implementation of the agreement – facilitated by IGAD is on track. In Libya, we are working with the United Nations to organize a national conference in June in Addis Ababa that will pave the way for general elections.

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7. The positive developments on the continent are encouraging but the challenges facing our continent are significant. There remain a dozen active conflicts and crisis situations in Africa on the PSC agenda, and it is of utmost importance that we continue to monitor these closely, particularly in Libya, the Sahel region, the Horn and the Great Lakes to name a few.

8. This year, 14 elections remain to be held in Africa. Though there is an expectation that most of these events will remain peaceful, there are strong possibilities that some may experience violence. Past experiences have shown us that disputes over voter registration, the composition and membership of election management bodies, the lack of adequate consultations on impending election timelines, debates around the issues of succession and term limits, as well as the rejection of electoral outcomes have been some of the driving forces behind heightened tensions and violence in some Member States.

9. It is important that we monitor closely the upcoming elections and provide our Member States the technical support needed to avoid misinterpretation that often leads to miscalculations and violence. Notably, honorable members of the PAP form an integral part of the AU Election Observation Missions. In essence, PAP is in prime position to contribute to success of these elections. We must continually remind our Member States that the successes of political transitions are underscored by the capacity and willingness of each state to ensure fairness, equity and recourse to the rule of law as a means of preventing social unrest.

10. We are also witnessing a rise in popular uprisings on the continent. These are often organised by workers unions and youth organizations that feel disconnected from the mainstream political parties they accuse of not providing solutions to their plight. The rising influence of social media over the years has contributed greatly to deepen democracy by serving as a tool to mobilize, yet it has also been used as a tool of spreading misinformation

resulting in social turbulence. Balance between enforcing freedom of speech and securing law and order is paramount - especially in light of upcoming elections.

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11. I would like to address the dangers of increased terrorism in Africa. Though continent-wide strides have been made in tackling terrorism, the threat of terrorist groups attacking our Member States remains high. It is vital not only to focus on the Islamic State but also on Al Qaeda and its global affiliates as they continue to conspire and recruit disgruntled African youth into their movements. Their danger lies in their abilities to inspire and guide through a sophisticated and decentralized operation as demonstrated in the January attack in Nairobi, Kenya, that claimed the lives of 21 innocent people. The countries most affected by terrorism are: Mali, Somalia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger but it should not be lost on us that terrorism knows no boundaries. Boko Haram, for example, claimed more than 1300 lives in 2018 in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

12. Adding on to this - transnational organized crimes have also become entwined with terrorist groups' activities and are providing them with new sources of funding. This can be clearly seen through the continued trafficking of migrants across our borders.

13. Furthermore, bioterrorism and cyber-security are looming threats that are of concern to Africa. Recent incidents have shown attempts by terrorist groups to attack Kenya and the Kingdom of Morocco with anthrax and an unknown number of genetically engineered organisms. These events indicate that the threat may continue to exist in the near future and the public health, emergency responders and law enforcement should be on high alert. Cyber security is also one of the new trends that is disrupting institutions thus requires our attention as we move forward.

14. Our response to counter the threat of terrorism remains heavy on the military side, with support from global powers carrying out surveillance, training local forces, and also directly targeting militant groups in the Sahel Region amongst other areas. There, however, remains an urgency to address the socio-economic and political factors that have led some of our own communities to join these violent movements. Therefore, I reiterate, as I did previously in many forums, the need to adopt a holistic strategy that addresses the structural issues fueling the rise and spread of violent extremism in African regions.

15. The clashes between farmers and nomadic herdsmen reached alarming levels in 2018. More than 1800 deaths were attributed to transhumance related conflicts. This violence, which straddles countries, has increased the displacement of communities leading to tensions in border areas. This is a serious issue that will retain our attention this year. We are now discovering that the tensions between the pastoralists and farmers are not only as a result of climate change but that they are also the result of man-made conflicts over natural resources.

16. We are also witnessing a resurgence in border disputes as illustrated by the recent tensions between Kenya and Somalia over their maritime boundaries. The AU Border Programme (AUBP) was specifically established to address such disputes and in general our Member States have shown the political will to peacefully resolve their disagreements. This has been seen through the continued requests of assistance that the AUBP has received from Member States to delineate and demarcate their borders. It is our hope that Kenya and Somalia will use this important tool to amicably address their differences.

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17. There are more challenges that I have not evoked but I cannot omit. Epidemics such as Ebola, Yellow Fever, or Cholera continue to displace many on our continent.

18. The thread tying our conflict prevention efforts together is our ability to pool our resources and use them correctly. According to a recent World Bank report on Global Economic prospects and I quote: 'Sub-Saharan Africa's economic growth is anticipated to pick up to 3.4% in 2019 and 3.7% in 2020-2021'. That said per capita income growth is likely to remain modest and progress in poverty reduction limited. Key external risks could include an unexpectedly sharp decline in commodity prices, an abrupt tightening of global financial conditions and escalating trade tensions involving major economies. Domestic risks will pertain to fiscal slippage, political uncertainty, domestic conflicts, and adverse weather conditions.' In other words, we are likely to be confronted with more challenges and less resources.

19. Despite the apparent pervasive state of conflicts in Africa, we are experiencing a widening gulf between early warning and early response. This gap is often underlined by our Member States' invocation of the principle of sovereignty that limits the role of the African Union, RECs/RMs from assisting in preventing conflicts.

18. The budget to prevent and respond to conflicts is not commensurate with the challenge at hand. Our instruments to prevent conflicts are not signed, ratified or domesticated by our Member States at the right pace.

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19. What can the Pan African Parliament do assist us in our efforts to prevent conflicts?

20. First, I believe that we need to provide the necessary resources to our continental organization to respond. We have made significant progress in this regard, but the bureaucracy and the operational budgets for Peace and Security have been drastically reduced.

21. Secondly, there are six important instruments that we have developed that if they are signed, ratified and domesticated would go a long way in our efforts to prevent conflicts. These include (i) the Protocol on the prevention and combatting terrorism, (ii) the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; (iii) the African Union Non-Aggression and Common Defense Pact; (iv) the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced people (Kampala Convention); (v) the African Union Convention on Preventing and combatting corruption and finally the (vi) the Niamey Convention on cross border cooperation.

22. Thirdly, it is strategically important to ensure that we build the capacity of our Member States to be the first responders. The PAP should encourage member states to work with the African Union Commission to build their national peace infrastructure such as their National Early Warning Systems. Some countries have already benefited from the assistance of the AU Commission. We have also adopted tools to assist Member States to assess their vulnerabilities and resilience. The PAP should encourage countries to take advantage of the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment/Mitigation Strategy (CSVRA/MS). Last year, we assisted Ghana to identify its vulnerabilities and are now working with the Government of Ghana on mitigation strategies.

23. Lastly, the PAP should support our efforts to ensure that women and young people play an active role in the prevention and mediation of conflicts. Support to our efforts to operationalize FemWise and the Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa would go a long way in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Mr. Speaker

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24. We are at a critical juncture. Surely, we are unfamiliar with an Africa free of challenges, but the future is here; our trials are uniquely our own and more multidimensional than ever before. A kaleidoscope of opportunities for peace and conflict confront us daily depending on which way we choose to acknowledge the facts. Some opponents of our mission have faces, followers, and force. Others, like climate change, are discreet opponents, devoid of intention and yet capable of deferring our individual and collective dreams. The only constant is that our people are the sole victims. The imminence of conflict is exactly why we have to double down. Our duty today is to commit to a well-rounded effort, and I thank you for coming together to do so.

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