

**Message of H.E. Ambassador Smail Chergui, African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace (Peace Day), 21 September, 2017.**

Today, we join our brothers and sisters worldwide of all races, languages and cultures, beliefs and affiliations, to observe the International Day of Peace.

As the world commemorates this day under the theme, **“Together for Peace: Respect, Safety and Dignity for All”**, we are reminded of the plight of our daughters, sons, mothers and fathers who have fled extreme circumstances especially during armed conflicts to preserve the most sacred gift of all – Life. We are also reminded of the plight of our children and youth taking extreme risks for social and economic reasons towards what they perceive as greener pastures. We are reminded by their pains, fears and struggles, but also by their courage, faith and perseverance, as they continue to overcome callous circumstances and look to us to unite our efforts and restore their safety, respect and dignity. We are reminded that we are all human, equal and deserve a dignified life. And that is why we cannot remain indifferent to the difficulties that some of our people have been forced to live for too long for no fault of theirs. We must therefore in our little ways wherever we are, strive to make a difference in order to make our communities, cities and countries better places for all of humanity. We must act now to support the millions of persons whose daily existence is bereft of opportunities. We must take our responsibilities and give them hope and a sense of life and of possibilities.

Peace Day is an important day for us as Africans to reflect on how far we have come from slavery to colonization and the new world order. It is important to remember our fallen soldiers, who have paid the ultimate price to preserve the peace we enjoy, despite evolving and complex threats which we are increasingly faced with, especially violent extremism and terrorism. In Somalia, Africa has lost the same number of soldiers in 10 years operations of AMISOM than the UN in 70 years. We also remember our people from parts of Northern Africa, Central Africa, the Sahel region, the Great Lakes region and the Lake Chad Basin whose lives have been cut short by unfortunate armed conflicts and wars. It is time to be each other’s keeper.

In Africa, our Heads of State and Government dedicated the year 2017 to young people, recognizing that youths have a critical role to play for sustainable peace and development. That is why this year at the African Union, we have chosen to commemorate Peace Day 2017 under the theme, **“Harnessing the Demographic Dividend: Meaningful Youth Inclusion in Peace-Building”**. My message to all young Africans is: the present belongs to you and Africa will be what you choose to make of it. I call on Member States to ensure your meaningful participation in peace-building activities, including; countering violent extremism, conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict reconstruction. Take action today for peace and for prosperity in your spaces. You hold the keys to a better Africa, the Africa we want.

Thank you.

2017-09-21

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