



**6TH ANNUAL RETREAT OF SPECIAL ENVOYS
AND MEDIATORS ON THE PROMOTION OF
PEACE, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN AFRICA**

SILENCING THE GUNS – TERRORISM, MEDIATION AND ARMED GROUPS

**WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA
21–22 OCTOBER 2015**

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1. The Sixth African Union (AU) Annual High-Level Retreat of Special Envoys and Mediators on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa was convened in Windhoek, Republic of Namibia, from 21 to 22 October 2015, on the theme: *"Silencing the Guns – Terrorism, Mediation and Armed Groups"*. This Retreat was organized by the AU Commission and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Namibia. The Durban-based African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the Institute of Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of the Addis Ababa University provided technical support for the Retreat.
2. The Retreat was officially opened by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui. The opening ceremony also featured statements by the Special Representative of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Head of the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), and Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, Ambassador Haile Menkerios. On behalf of H.E. Mr. Hage Gottfried Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, Right Honourable Netumbo Nandi Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for International Relations and Cooperation, delivered the keynote address of the Retreat, focusing on an overview of the peace and security situation in Africa and providing guidance on the way forward.
3. The Retreat brought together former Heads of State, senior representatives of the AU Commission, the Special Envoys and Representatives of the Chairperson of the Commission and members of the Panel of the Wise, as well as by representatives of the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs). Moreover, the Retreat was attended by several Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General and other senior officials representing the International Organisation of *La Francophonie* (OIF), the League of Arab States and the European Union (EU), and bilateral partners. Also in attendance were representatives of civil society organisations, think tanks and academia.
4. Held within the context of the on-going implementation of Agenda 2063, as adopted by the AU policy organs, the Retreat constituted an additional step to give practical expression to the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration, adopted by the Assembly of the Union, in Addis Ababa, on 25 May 2013, in which the Heads of State and Government pledged not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans, committing themselves to end all wars in Africa by 2020. Against this backdrop, and building on the Retreat held in Arusha, Tanzania, from 21 to 23 October 2014, the Windhoek Retreat aimed at taking forward the vision and plans for "Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020".
5. Participants acknowledged that the AU High-Level Retreats are central to promoting dialogue, sharing experiences and exchanging best practices that can contribute to African-specific narratives. During the Retreat, the deliberations focused on a wide range of issues revolving around the themes of terrorism and mediation. It was felt that discussing such issues at the highest level signals an important opening that can set the future counter-terrorism agenda in the Continent.
6. Participants noted that, although terrorism has affected the African continent for some time, the increase in frequency and scope of violent attacks by different groups and the growing presence of the so-called Islamic State in Africa - to which some groups have pledged allegiance -

are a matter of deep concern. Casualties, destruction of infrastructure, displacement and loss of livelihoods have been unprecedented. In Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic and in Libya, armed conflict and/or terrorism have resulted in a humanitarian crisis of grave proportions. There is an estimated 28 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across the Sahel. Moreover, it is likely that the conditions fuelling violent extremism will not subside in the immediate future, especially given the current dynamics in the Middle East and the increasing globalisation evident throughout the world.

7. Participants emphasised that terrorism must not be seen as a static phenomenon, its nature changing over time and place. This phenomenon has been conceptualised, indeed defined, in a variety of ways, not all consistent. Terrorism, violent extremism and religious extremism are used interchangeably, with a tendency to currently associate the phenomenon exclusively with religious extremism, especially some versions of militant Islamism. Therefore, some level of consensus on how these concepts are defined is central to the development of appropriate responses and solutions, in order to reduce the risk that counter-terrorism strategies are developed in the pursuit of narrow interests. In this regard, Participants took cognisance of the definitions contained in the AU legal instruments, including the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (1999) and the Supplementary Protocol (2004), as well as in the AU Plan of Action (2002), which are relevant as they focus on the “act of terrorism”, placing terrorism squarely in the domain of tactics rather than a strategy or political objective.

8. Participants were briefed on the different security cooperation mechanisms that have been established at the regional level, with particular emphasis on the *Nouakchott Process on the Enhancement of Security Cooperation and the Operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahel-Saharan Region*, the *Djibouti Process on the Enhancement of Security Cooperation in East Africa* and the *Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA)*. In addition, Participants were informed of other efforts undertaken by the AU Commission, including those of the African Centre for Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) and of the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission in charge of Counter-Terrorism Cooperation, in support of the measures taken by Member States to combat terrorism. Mention was also made of the efforts being deployed by the member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Benin, as part of the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) responsible for combating the Boko Haram terrorist group, and of the creation of the African Police Cooperation Mechanism (AFRIPOL), as well as of the establishment, by the Commission, of an Advisory Team responsible for supporting the AU in the monitoring and implementation of the relevant provisions of the communiqué of the 455th meeting of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) held in Nairobi, Kenya, on 2 September 2014, and devoted to the issue of violent extremism and counter-terrorism in Africa.

9. Participants noted that the global debate is shifting from "war on terror" to other types of responses with a more holistic approach. Terrorism and violent extremism represent a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, requiring a comprehensive counter-strategy. In this view, Participants debated extensively the nature, dynamics and causes of terrorism, providing a much-needed historical perspective. Understanding the root causes of terrorism, as well as the motivations that underline radicalisation leading to violent extremism, were considered to be crucial. Participants identified specific internal contexts and underlying grievances, on the one hand,

and the external influences that have shaped the discourse and actions of these movements. On the other hand, a more nuanced and informed understanding of these groups is vital as they sometimes stem and receive support from local communities. Such understanding may help avoiding the risk to reject possible legitimate claims and demonize political movements by simply defining them as terrorists. This includes an analysis of their background, evolution, ideologies, grievances and motivations, bearing in mind that analysis and understanding do not mean legitimize terror.

10. Participants, in this regard, highlighted the importance of the role of mediation. There is no single policy formula for complex peace negotiations, and wrong strategies within such highly complex activity may only result in continuing to chase the problems without resolving them. The recognized Africa's extensive experience in mediation and negotiation should therefore form the basis simultaneously for a reflection on international policies for combating terrorism and violent extremism in the Continent, but also be used in the development of a more comprehensive multilateral counter-terrorism response.

11. Participants concurred that a combination of structural causes and aggravating factors must be considered. Socio-economic, political and identity-driven marginalisation, unequal distribution of resources, deprivation and poverty, illiteracy, poor governance and institutional weaknesses, including in the law and order sector, the existence of long stretches of porous, largely ill-monitored and poorly-controlled borders, among others, were considered as key underlying factors. Aggravating factors include high rates of unemployment among the youth and the general population, rendering them vulnerable to the manipulative messages of terrorist groups and their promises of quick gain, organised crime and the proliferation of arms, and the effects of a mobilising ideology, which, at times, places religion at its centre. Importantly, militarised responses to some situations can also be considered as contributing factors to the proliferation of terrorism and violent extremism.

12. Participants, noting that responses have been often designed to address the symptoms of terrorism and violent extremism through military and security centred counter-terrorism strategies, stressed the need for pragmatic yet holistic approaches to be devised. Military and security focused counter-terrorism interventions may seem effective in the short-term; however, they have proven unsustainable and ineffective in the long-term, often counter-productive and resulting in an increased pool of individuals vulnerable to radicalisation. Especially if non-state armed groups count on popular support, they cannot be defeated by military action alone, and a political solution should be envisaged necessarily to resolve violent insurgencies.

13. Participants agreed that, at the heart of such holistic approaches, there must be a focus on the structural dimensions underlying radicalisation – indeed, effective prevention of terrorism and violent extremism requires addressing its underlying causes. Considerable emphasis must therefore be placed on good governance, particularly the promotion of accountable, transparent and inclusive governance systems based on the rule of law, as well as on addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality. In addition, efforts should also be focused on social and community cohesion, education and a culture of dialogue. These dimensions are crucial, bearing in mind the trends concerning the continent's changing demographic profile, broader socio-economic and environmental conditions, and their subsequent impacts on sustainable peace and security.

14. Addressing the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism requires knowledge, experience, determination, collaboration, courage and creativity. Participants advocated that political solutions must become central to comprehensive strategies that address terrorism and violent extremism. The development of counter-narratives on terrorism and violent extremism, which go beyond the current emphasis on military and security responses, must be included as part of these political solutions, which, in themselves, must be culturally sensitive. Negotiation and mediation, central tools in the basket of political responses, should always be considered and implemented on a case-by-case basis. Participants felt that additional reflection and consideration of the potential costs and benefits of such approaches must be undertaken, including a consideration of available resources (human and financial).

15. Participants acknowledged the need for Africa to more effectively contribute to the definition of the international security agenda, to ensure that its concerns are more adequately taken into account and avoid the negative impact that arises as a result of inadequately designed international interventions. Furthermore, such active involvement of the Continent in the definition of the international security agenda will also enable Africa to share its rich experience with the rest of the world. In this regard, Participants highlighted the continued efforts to develop an innovative partnership with the UN, in particular the Security Council, in the context of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter on the role of regional arrangements in the maintenance of international peace and security. This is particularly the case with regard to the design of African solutions to African problems, an approach that should be premised on proper contextualisation and in-depth understanding of the challenges at hand.

16. Participants to Retreat made the following recommendations:

- (i) Addressing the scourge of terrorism is not a short-term exercise, but a long-term commitment requiring firm political will, mobilisation of considerable resources, close collaboration and carefully conducted and shared analysis. It is imperative that in-depth, comprehensive and up-to-date analyses be undertaken by competent institutions, including the AU, prior to the development of strategies and operations. Strategies and responses must be developed on the basis of a realistic assessment of each situation, as well as resources and capabilities available to each organisation;
- (ii) Counter-terrorism requires a holistic response, involving military and security dimensions, as well as approaches designed to address the multi-dimensional root causes and drivers of terrorism and violent extremism. It is critical that actors involved in counter-terrorism devote appropriate attention and resources to sustainably addressing the drivers of radicalisation and extremism, including through the promotion of the rule of law and the protection of human rights;
- (iii) Actors involved in counter-terrorism must urgently consider the conditions which make political solutions appropriate, especially through negotiation and mediation, including a comprehensive reflection on how to adapt existing strategies and operational dimensions of these processes to the specificities of terrorism and violent extremism in each specific context. This is particularly relevant for the AU

and the RECs/RMs, as well as civil society actors, which can build on their extensive experience to reflect on the adequacy of developing mediation and negotiation approaches;

- (iv) Prevention of violent extremism and terrorism must be prioritised and placed at the top of the African policy agenda: emphasis must be placed on good governance, particularly the promotion of accountable, transparent and inclusive governance systems, law and order, as well as addressing poverty and inequality and promoting tolerance and secularism;
- (v) At policy and normative levels, it is crucial that AU instruments and decisions pertaining to terrorism be scrupulously and systematically implemented and monitored. At an operational level, efforts initiated must be stepped up, in line with the relevant provisions of the 2nd September 2014 meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council;
- (vi) The AU should ensure that the deliberations and recommendations of this 6th Annual Retreat are taken into consideration and incorporated where possible into the on-going Nouakchott and Djibouti Processes, as well as shared with the RECs/RMs.

17. The Retreat seized on the opportunity to pay tribute and present to H.E. former President Sam Nujoma and Dr. Maria Ruth Neto the *Son and Daughter of Africa Award* for their lifetime contributions to the Pan-African cause, including liberation from colonialism and independence of African States, continental integration, peace and security, the role of women and human rights.

18. Participants expressed their sincere gratitude to the people and Government of Namibia for their warm welcome and hospitality, as well as for the excellent facilities provided towards the successful organisation of the Retreat.