CONCEPT NOTE

International Day of Peace

21 September 2018

“Youth Participation in the Fight against Corruption: Ensuring the Right to Peace”

I. Background

The United Nations declared 21st September as International Day of Peace (Peace Day) – ceasefire and non-violence, in recognition of the importance of addressing the challenges of peace and security. It is observed around the world, providing an opportunity for individuals, organisations and nations to commit to peace above all differences and to contribute to building a Culture of Peace.

This year, the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU), OXFAM and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), will jointly commemorate the Peace Day under the theme, “Youth Participation in the Fight Against Corruption: Ensuring the Right to Peace”. The theme takes cognizance of the African Union (AU) theme for the Year, “Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation”; and of this year’s International Day of Peace theme, “The Right to Peace: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70”.

Adopted on 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was the first international recognition that all human beings have fundamental rights and freedoms and it continues to be a living and relevant document today. The Declaration, born amidst the ashes of the Second World War, is arguably one of the biggest achievements of the United Nations (UN). It embodies one overarching principle; that safeguarding human rights is, “the foundation of peace in the world”. It represents a milestone in the history of human rights across continents, and the bedrock for every other human rights instrument that has since been elaborated, including in Africa. Building on the UDHR, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, not only enshrines rights that are fundamental for peace, but expressly guarantees and codifies the “right to peace and security” as a human right in and of itself (Article 22, ACHPR). Beyond normative reinforcement, the AU and the UN have stepped up on collaboration in the area of human rights.

On 24 April 2018, the first African Union – United Nations High Level Dialogue on Human Rights was held at the African Union Headquarters. The main objective was to ‘enhance the strategic partnership between the UN and the AU in human and peoples’ rights. Both organizations agreed to work together to strengthen the existing collaboration aimed at advancing the promotion and protection of human rights. One of the key outcomes outlined in a communiqué issued afterwards reads as follows: the “AU and the UN agreed to work collaboratively together to deliver on the declaration of this year (2018) by the AU Policy Organs as the Year of Winning the Fight Against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to
Africa’s Transformation. To this end, both sides will work together in their efforts to combat corruption as a threat to the enjoyment of human and peoples’ rights in Africa”. In addition, the Joint United Nations – African Union Framework for Enhanced Peace and Security on sustaining peace, notes that, “human rights violations may be early warning signs of future conflict or indicator of the evolution of conflict”. It further notes that the two organizations “will work together in the field of human rights…”

As stated above, the crosscutting nature of the fight against corruption, the right to peace and human rights is evident in the themes selected for 2018 both by the African Union and the United Nations.

II. Rationale

Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stipulates that all people are, “entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized”. Seventy years since the drafting of these words, this promise remains unfulfilled in the light of recent and emerging trends of global insecurity and intractable conflicts. Amongst other factors, corruption continues to undermine both the international and the social order and the rule of law at every level. In Africa, corruption undermines social and economic development and is a major hindrance to peace and development, including youth development. Unemployment or underemployment, and lack of social security, business capital and educational opportunities, are some of the challenges that youth face. The employment prospects of many young people across the continent are hampered by corruption, thereby limiting their access to basic services. The youth, who constitute the highest proportion of society and are the primary victims of corruption, are however, a “demographic window of opportunity” to end this menace.

Corruption acquires huge proportions in countries suffering or recovering from conflict, acting as a major constraint on the development of peaceful and sustainable societies, and often encouraging a further downward spiral. In recent years, the destabilizing effects of corruption have taken many forms. It is a concern for post-conflict societies because it can easily emerge as the new order, following the devastating impacts of conflict on state institutions and their delivery capacity. Further, it deprives the youth, the poor and vulnerable of essential services, leaving them to fear for the safety of their family and suffer daily extortion. This drives a wedge between them and the institutions meant to serve them. While the youth, the poor often suffer the most, this cycle of impunity leaves ordinary people disempowered, unable to seek justice in courts or hold politicians to account. This reinforces impoverishment, but also sows the seeds of conflict by dissolving any ties of loyalty between people and a state seemingly captured by private interests. By contrast, people with a stake in society are more likely to reject those who preach violence to achieve their ends. It is not surprising therefore, that a constant and sad correlation between corruption and conflict persists. In such environments, hopes of lasting peace and stability can only be fleeting unless solutions are found for the root causes of instability. When corruption becomes entrenched, it undermines the development of state authority and its institutions, leaving a weak state with potentially more space for insurgents.

1 7th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum concept note
Wining the fight against corruption and ensuring the right to peace and other human rights is vital in Africa. Against this backdrop, on 01 July 2003, AU Member States adopted the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which entered into force in 2006, barely three years later. Pursuant to this commitment, the AU declared 2018 the year of “Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation”. When President Buhari of Nigeria launched the AU theme of the year 2018 on fighting corruption in the continent, he promised, inter alia, “to organize an African Youth Congress against corruption, in order to sensitize and engage our youth in the fight against corruption”. Thus, Member States are encouraged to align National Youth Policies with the AU Reforms if they are to make the most of the continent’s youth bulge and review and implement laws, rules and regulations at national, regional and continental levels. The AU has adopted several normative frameworks to guarantee the protection and promotion of the rights of young people. The African Governance Architecture Youth Engagement Strategy (AGA-YES) is one such framework with the aim of valorizing the African Youth Charter to foster participatory and active engagement of young Africans in governance and democratic processes in their respective Member States.

In this light, the African Union Peace and Security Department (AU PSD), in partnership with the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU), OXFAM and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at Addis Ababa University, have come together to co-host a panel discussion entitled, “Youth participation in the fight against corruption: Ensuring the right to peace”, to raise awareness on AU and UN instruments on corruption, human rights and peace; explore the primordial roles of young people in breaking the vicious cycle of corruption, human rights violations and conflicts, and to brainstorm on practical options for a more meaningful engagement of young people in this mutually reinforcing endeavor.

III. Goal and objectives

The proposed event seeks to provide a platform that will encourage an exchange of views on the nexus between peace, human rights and corruption and the role of the youth particularly regarding civil society and youth action in Africa.

The specific objectives include:

i. Increase understanding of close links between human rights, corruption and sustainable peace and development in Africa and the role of the youth with regards to AU instruments and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

ii. Strengthen knowledge on mechanisms and opportunities that promote peace and winning the fight against corruption through the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), African Governance Architecture (AGA), AU Instruments on corruption and youth.

iii. Cultivate a better understanding of youth perceptions on solution-based dialogue touching on the need for integrity, attitudinal and behavioral change towards fighting corruption and playing a part in creating peaceful societies where human rights are upheld.
iv. Recognize achievements and address challenges regarding youth involvement in fighting corruption at all levels, including concretizing the explicit linkage between fighting corruption and ensuring resilient communities and enhancing pathways for greater engagement of the youth.

IV. Expected outcomes

These include:

i. Greater understanding amongst youth of the nexus between peace, human rights and corruption, mindful of the negative socio-political and economic impact of corruption to sustainable peace and development;

ii. Enhanced awareness on mechanisms and unique opportunities that promote peace and winning the fight against corruption on the continent and achieving peace through the promulgation of human rights, in relevant APSA, AGA and AU Instruments on Corruption and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

iii. Contribute to cultivating youth responsibility to take up action that facilitates the achievement of peace and human rights while at the same time fighting corruption.

iv. Partnerships are created between Member States, AU PSD, UNOAU, OHCHR, youth and relevant stakeholders, to facilitate peace/human rights and the fight against corruption.

v. Activities

a. Panel Discussion

On Thursday 04 October 2018, a panel discussion titled, “Youth participation in the fight against corruption: Ensuring the right to peace”, will see the participation of youth organizations, civil society, academia, experts from international organizations and Member States along the following broad thematic areas with focus on conflict affected settings:

1. Making Peace and Rights count for youths as partners to the peace-building process.
2. Using AU Instruments in Combatting Corruption and Promoting Peace
3. Overview of African Youth initiatives in the fight against corruption
4. Practical steps for Youth Engagement in Mitigating Corruption and Fostering Peace: Lessons Learned, Opportunities and Challenges.

b. Art Performance:


On 04 October, (initially planned for 21 September), let us all, collectively and individually, say no to corruption and commit to fight this scourge in all its forms.