AFRICA AMNESTY MONTH: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AU THEME OF THE YEAR 2020
“SILENCING THE GUNS: CREATING CONDUCIVE CONDITIONS FOR AFRICA’S DEVELOPMENT”

STATEMENT BY

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Excellency Ambassador Mohamed Idriss Farah, Chairperson of the Month of September of the Peace and Security Council

Distinguished Members of the PSC

Excellency Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra, African Union High Representative for Silencing the Guns

Excellency Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to begin by congratulating the Chairperson of this month, September, His Excellency Ambassador Mohamed Idriss Farah, Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the African Union, and Members of Council, for scheduling this very important meeting today, which is the fourth conduct and commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month since its adoption by the AU Assembly in January 2017. As you are aware, the Africa Amnesty Month is an integral aspect of the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa.

I wish to acknowledge the presence of Ms. Nakamitsu, UN Under Secretary General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for the continued cooperation and partnership with the AU, particularly in its efforts to put an end to crisis and conflicts within the African continent. Indeed, the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, signed by the Secretary-General of the UN and the Chairperson of the AU Commission in 2017, has continued to provide a solid foundation for both organizations to have a predictable, systematic and strategic partnership.

I would also like to thank other the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs), as well as partners in attendance, and to express the AU’s appreciation for their support towards the broader quest for a peaceful, secure and conflict-free Africa. You will all agree that, these forums provide us with an opportunity to reflect and build on our collective efforts towards addressing and removing the fundamental causes and drivers of conflicts, particularly the proliferation of illicit weapons from the possession of civilians, which is expected to contribute to silencing the guns in our continent.

Indeed, the African continent continues to make significant strides in dealing with its traditional security challenges, including advancing the principles and practices of democracy and good governance, and in consolidating peace and facilitating recovery in countries emerging from conflict. In this regard, our Union has exerted tremendous efforts in deploying robust peace support operations that have had a positive impact on reducing violence, protecting affected populations, defeating rogue elements and creating the conditions for meaningful political processes and sustainable peace and development.
However, one of the challenges to sustainable peace and development is the continued availability of illicit weapons.

Chairperson
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to note that the year 2020 is the climax for the implementation of the following key AU programs:

1. AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020;
2. Conduct and commemoration of the month of September as “Africa Amnesty Month for the surrender and collection of illicit small arms and light weapons, from 2017 to 2020; and
3. Implementation of activities under the AU Theme for 2020: “Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development”.

Notably, the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic has had an unprecedented disruption in the implementation of the various planned activities on silencing the guns by the Member States, RECs/RECs, the Commission, as well as the UN and other institutions and partners.

Albeit these challenges, we are currently undertaking the collection of illicit weapons in possession of civilians. The Commission, in partnership with Small Arms Survey, undertook a Mapping Study on Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa in 2019. One significant finding of the Study, was the number of civilian-held weapons in the African continent, which was estimated at forty million (40,000,000), as of 2017; which is almost 80% of all arms on the continent. This includes private individuals, registered businesses such as private security companies, and non-state armed groups. This is as opposed to the estimate of the continent’s armed forces and law enforcement agencies that hold less than 11 million arms.

Also, of the forty million civilian-held weapons, about 5.8 million are recorded as being officially registered, while about 16 million are unregistered. The status of the remaining 18 million is unclear. This is a cause for concern for all of us. Accordingly, we need to redouble our efforts to address this challenge, which in fact is a very serious threat to peace, governance and development. In this connection, it is important to ask ourselves how many of these unregistered weapons have been collected, whether within the framework of the Amnesty Month, or through other national disarmament programs.

Even without benefiting from the Study that provides an account in the present situation, I can say that there is more to be done to ensure that these illicit weapons are removed from the possession of civilians. The conduct of the Africa Amnesty Month during this September is important in fulfilling the letter and spirit of the 2013 Assembly Solemn Declaration to rid Africa of wars and usher in prosperity for the citizens.
Therefore, I wish to call upon Council to take into consideration the following:

1) To recommend to the Assembly of the Union to extend the conduct of the Africa Amnesty Month, within the context of the First Ten Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP) of Agenda 2063 (2013-2023), in which silencing the guns project is included;
2) Reiterate its call on Member States to strengthen physical stockpile security and management, in order to minimize diversion of weapons from national arms depots;
3) Appeal to Member States to enhance their efforts in the registration of weapons, in accordance with their respective national laws;
4) Request Member States to strengthen or for those who have not yet done so, to establish national institutions responsible for registration of civilian-owned weapons, and marking of State-owned arms;
5) Call upon Member States to enact or update laws regulating civilian possession of small arms and light weapons;
6) Call upon Member States to renew their commitment to develop and implement programs to remove illicit weapons possessed by civilians, including addressing factors, social, cultural, economic and political, that drive civilians to acquire arms;
7) It is important for the PSC to note with serious concern the weakly regulated global arms trade and widespread diversion of conventional arms to the illicit markets in Africa. Hence, there is an imperative for the PSC to reiterate its decision to name and shame suppliers and recipients of illicit weapons in Africa;
8) The PSC may wish to call on legal arms manufactures and brokers to support the efforts to combat illicit arms trade by ensuring end-user verification and certification, in line with the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

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I wish to recognize that some Member States have successfully conducted civilian disarmament programs, generating important experiences and lessons, for the continent to draw from to further consolidate its efforts. Council may therefore wish to request the Commission to conduct a lessons-learned study that covers, not only the experiences of the Africa Amnesty Month, but also various national programs that were implemented outside the Amnesty Month. The findings may serve as a reference for the follow-up for arms management and disarmament programs. These efforts should be deployed in a sustainable and coordinated manner given their impact on mitigating crises and conflicts in the continent.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the involvement of other actors, including civil society, especially youth and women, the media, and the private sector as essential contributors to community mobilization and action. I would also like to recognize the efforts of the AU Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) Peace and Security Cluster for organizing the E-Caravan of Peace during this month, in line with the conduct of the Africa Amnesty Month. The objective is
to encourage and provide an opportunity to African citizens in illegal possession and use of weapons, to voluntarily surrender them to designated State institutions, with guarantees for non-prosecution. These efforts need to be commended and encouraged. We have the Chair of the ECOSOCC Peace and Security Cluster with us today, who will give us more details on the conduct of this important activity, which is much closer to the people.

On our part, the AU Commission, in collaboration with the RECs/RMs and Partners, will continue to support the efforts of the Member States to develop and implement their arms management and disarmament programs. We are guided by the same objective, which is to build a conflict-free Africa.

I thank you for your attention.