The AU Commission convened a technical consultative meeting on the operationalization of the WiseYouth Network, on 31 August to 01 September 2023, in Bujumbura, Burundi. This consultative meeting took place within the context of the Inter-Regional Knowledge Exchange (I-RECKE) platform, and brought together: H.E. Domitien Ndayizeye, Former President of the Republic of Burundi and member of the AU Panel of the Wise, representatives from the Ministry of East African Community Affairs, Youth, Sports and Culture of Burundi, Dr. Akok Madut, the Head of the AU Mediation and Dialogue Division (MDD), and technical experts from the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), the G5-Sahel, and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). It also brought together the African Youth Ambassadors for peace (AYAPs), representatives from the Directorates and Divisions of the AU Commission engaged in promoting the youth mandate including the Office of the Chairperson’s Special Envoy on Youth, the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD), the Youth4Peace programme, and MDD, as well as youth engaged in mediation efforts, and YPS policy experts from the Network of Think Tanks for Peace (NeTT4Peace).

The meeting welcomed the ongoing efforts by the Commission to operationalize the WiseYouth Network, which was established through a decision of the 35th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2022 (Assembly/AU/Dec.815(XXXV), as a subsidiary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise (hereafter The Panel), with the aim of promoting a focused and strategic engagement of youth in conflict prevention, mediation and peace processes across the Continent.
To this end, the meeting received an overview of the state of youth, peace and security in the various regions on the continent, with focus on the ongoing contributions being made by youth in conflict prevention, mediation, dialogue and peace process efforts particularly at grassroots, national and regional levels. The meeting also reviewed the existing structures within the Commission that work on youth related issues, with the aim of comprehensively understand the role/mandate of the respective offices, their areas of complementarity and harmonization, and their expected linkages with the WiseYouth Network. Additionally, in line with the mandate of the I-RECKE Platform, all RECs, RMs, and regional organizations provided updates on their efforts to strengthen and streamline youth in peace and security within their respective regional levels. Relatedly, the meeting applauded their ongoing efforts which include: the development of regional YPS policy frameworks; the creation of networks or rosters of YPS experts that can be tapped into when constituting the membership of the WiseYouth network; and the continued commitment to build the capacities of youth to meaningfully engage in peace, security and stability efforts.

Toward the operationalization of WiseYouth, the technical meeting reviewed the draft operational modalities for the Network, as well as the Terms of Reference, and in this regard, made the following key recommendations:

1. The WiseYouth Network will be composed of twenty-six members, observing gender parity, with two members each nominated from all the RECs, RMs, the LCBC, and the G5-Sahel. They will be drawn from regional YPS networks engaged with these respective institutions in order to ensure greater ownership, and to develop direct linkages by WiseYouth members to both regional and continental led peace process efforts. Additionally, the five (5) African Youth Ambassadors will also be part of the WiseYouth Network, and consideration should be made on nominating members from youth-led civil society organizations. In line with the mandate of the Panel of the Wise, each cohort of the Network will have a tenure of three (3) years;

2. Key engagements by the network will be to: promote capacity development by youth to engage in conflict prevention, mediation and peace processes; facilitate regular intergenerational exchange with mediation practitioners including with the Panel of the Wise and the PanWise Networks; develop meaningful partnerships to promote youth conflict prevention and peace efforts particularly at regional and national levels; and deploy or create opportunities for network members to support both regional and continental mediation, dialogue and peace interventions as leaders and partners of these processes;

3. A code of conduct should be developed for the Network, and the role of youth living with disabilities should be duly mainstreamed and considered in the implementation of the Networks’ mandate;
4. The nomination process for WiseYouth members is expected to resume in September 2023, and the first cohort of the Network will be inaugurated before the next Summit of AU Heads of State and Government.

The Commission wishes to thank the Panel of the Wise, the RECs, RMs, regional organizations, youth mediators and experts for their continued commitment to advancing the YPS Agenda on the continent, and to operationalizing the WiseYouth network as a core tenet of ensuring and promoting more inclusive peace process on the continent.