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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 551 7700 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321
Email: situationroom@africa-union.org

PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
706TH MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
26 JULY 2017

PSC/PR/BR. (DCCVI)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), dedicated its 706th meeting held on 26 July 2017, to an Open Session on the theme: “Child Soldiers/Out of School Children in Armed Conflict in Africa”.

Council and Participants took note of the opening statements made by the PSC Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chair of the PSC for the month of July 2017, and the Commissioner for Social Affairs, H.E. Mrs Amira ElFadil. They also took note of the presentations made by Ambassador Osman Keh-Kamara, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone, Dr. A. Olatunbosun - Alakija, Chief Coordinator Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Humanitarian Coordination Nigeria, and Micheal Lumor, Advisor Humanitarian and Education of Save the Children. Council further took note of statements by AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs), AU partners, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations and the European Union.

Council and participants recalled all existing AU instruments on protection of civilians in armed conflict, in particular the Organization of African Unity (OAU) 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the AU 2009 Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which is also known as the Kampala Convention. They also recalled all PSC communiqués and press statements on children in armed conflict situation in Africa. They highlighted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which made Africa the only continent with region-specific child rights instrument, including the right to education. They underscored in particular article 22 of the charter, which calls on the State Parties to take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostiles and refrain in particular, from recruiting any child. They further recalled resolution 1612 (2005) adopted in July 2005, in which the UN Security Council expressed its readiness to take appropriate sanctions against perpetrators of violence against children in armed conflict.

Council and participants reaffirmed their deep concern over the persistence of scourges related to violent conflicts and crisis situations in some parts of the African continent, which have resulted in losses of innocent lives, untold suffering to the people, internally displaced persons and refugees, destruction of infrastructure and the environment, as well as derailment of national development programmes and projects among others, affecting in particular the welfare of African children.

Council and participants expressed their deep concern at the high number of out-of-school children in Africa, particularly in countries affected by armed conflict and the resultant effect of extreme poverty, underlining that this disturbing trend need to receive the needed attention from political leaders, human rights activists, and other members of the international community including the AU, in line with the Assembly decision of January 2017 on the Implementation of the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by the year 2020. In this respect they welcomed the number of initiatives that have been launched during the past decades to curb the trend, although challenges are still impeding efforts to fight

against out of school children and the use of child soldiers in armed conflict in Africa, in line with the Safe Schools Declaration adopted at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools that defined guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. They also reaffirmed the Paris Commitment and Principles on the Protection of the Children in Armed Conflict, adopted by the International Conference “Free Children from War” held in Paris in 2007, building on the Cape Town principles and best practices.

Council and participants expressed particular solidarity with children from Member States affected by terrorism and violent extremism including those in the Lake Chad Basin Region, the Horn of Africa region, the Sahel region and in North Africa. In this regard, they called for a collective security efforts dealing with the scourges of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization in Africa, with a view to ensure respect for child rights and welfare.

Council and participants stressed once again the need to address the root causes of conflicts, including poverty, under-development, inequality and poor economic and political governance. In this context they recognized the imperative of comprehensive prevention approaches of conflict and crises on the continent, dealing with scourges such as proliferation of arms, violent extremism and terrorism.

Council and participants, in line with AU and UN relevant instruments and drawing lessons from specific cases like the conflict in Sierra Leone, stressed the need to continue developing a criminal legal framework to protect African children from armed conflict. In this regard they highlighted the need for African and International engagement with a view to ensure, through greater coordination of action and visibility, enhanced implementation of instruments regarding Child Soldiers and Out of School Children.

Council and participants also stressed the need to have enhanced coordination by the Departments of Social Affairs, Political Affairs, Science and Technology and Peace and Security, amongst others, to address issues pertaining to child soldiers and out-of-school children, in particular, their education, health and security. In this regard, they underscored the need for the AU to establish a comprehensive child protection architecture within the AU Commission, with a view to ensure the full implementation of various instruments adopted at continental and international level to this effect.

Council and participants reiterated the request to the Chairperson of the Commission to appoint a special envoy on children, peace and security, to ensure more attention and action on issues of children rights, safety, health, education and protection, particularly in conflict situation in Africa and to follow up and monitor the implementation of all mechanisms aimed at protecting the African child in conflict situation.

Council and participants recommended “Child Soldiering/Out of School Children” as an annual theme for a future AU Summit.

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.