

AFRICAN UNION



UNION AFRICAINE

الاتحاد الأفريقي

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 5513 822 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321
Email: situationroom@africa-union.org

PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
841ST MEETING
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
16 APRIL 2019

PSC/PR/BR. (DCCCXLI)

PRESS STATEMENT

PRESS STATEMENT

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), held its 841st meeting on 16 April 2019, which was dedicated to an open session on the theme: “Children Affected by Armed Conflicts in Africa”.

Council received a presentation from a child refugee Ms. Huda Kedir and took note of the debate on children affected by armed conflicts in Africa led by the panelists namely, Prof. Dr. Benyam Dawit Mezmur of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), the Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to AU and UNECA and the Representative of Save the Children. The debate was moderated by the Chairperson of the Peace and Security Council, Ambassador Adeoye Bankole, Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the AU.

Council recalled all its previous decisions and pronouncements on the plight of children in armed conflicts, particularly, Press Statements[PSC/PR/BR.(DCCVI)], adopted at its 706th meeting held on 26 July 2017 and[PSC/PR/BR.(DCCLVII)], adopted at its 757th meeting held on 13 March 2018. Council further recalled the AU Assembly decision Assembly/AU/Dec.718 (XXXII) adopted by the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Union held from 10 to 11 February 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which, among others, requested the Commission, in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to explore ways to strengthen the existing AU and RECs/RMs mechanisms on child protection.

Council expressed deep concern over the growing number of refugees and displaced children in Africa. Council stressed the need for applying various continental and international human rights normative frameworks, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problem in Africa, the Kampala Convention of 2009 on IDPs, the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child and the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, in protecting children in conflict situations.

Council underscored the importance of effectively addressing the root causes of forced displacement and urged Member States that are facing conflict and crisis situations, and those hosting refugees or internal displaced persons (IDPs), to expeditiously find political consensual means and ways of effectively resolving these conflicts and crises, as well to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, including their recruitment as soldiers.

Council commended all Member States that are currently hosting refugees in their countries and urged them to continue to provide safe environments for inclusive and quality education to refugee children, consistent with relevant continental and international normative frameworks for refugees and children.

Council noted with concern the testimonies of the children about their deplorable plight, the low level of implementation of its decisions on the issue, as well as the slow rate of adoption by member states of policy frameworks aimed at protecting children affected by armed conflicts including the Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, 1997; The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (The Paris Principles), 2007; The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, 2017; and The Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, 2015.

Council stressed the importance of the implementation of all existing AU and other relevant international instruments relating to the rights and welfare of all children, including refugee and displaced children. In this context, Council urged all AU Member States, which have not yet done so, to sign, ratify and fully domesticate all relevant AU and other international child protection instruments. Furthermore, Council requested the AU Commission, within the framework of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2015-2025, to work closely with Member States to address gaps in education policies at national, regional and continental levels, while ensuring that systems are put in place to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these policies.

Council called on all Member States in conflict situations to continuously take the necessary steps with a view to ensure full compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), in particular to ensure that schools are not attacked and used for military purposes. In this context, Council welcomed the initiatives taken by some Member States to promote and protect the right of children to education and to facilitate the continuation of education even in situations of armed conflicts. Council further encouraged all Member States that have not yet done so, to sign the 'Safe Schools' Declaration.

Council urged Member States and development partners not to treat education only as part of humanitarian assistance, but also as part of the national development agenda and as a long term investment by ensuring a future to children in need. Council underscored the importance of education of refugees and IDPs, as a tool to build peace, stability and communal cohesion, as well as prevent their conscription into armed groups, prevent them from human trafficking and smuggling, violent extremism and radicalization.

Council further urged the concerned countries to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights to the children refugees or IDPs, according to the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child.

In this regard, Council reaffirmed the penal responsibility of armed groups which violate the rights of refugees and IDPs, in conformity with the International Law, and recalled its Communiqué (PSC/PR/BR.(DCCLXXV)) of the 775th meeting held on 22 May 2018 and the

Assembly Decision (Assembly/AU/Dec.718(XXXII)) adopted during the 32nd session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which urged Member States hosting refugees and IDPs to assure the complete demilitarization of these camps and to preserve their civilian character, in order not to be turned from its initial objectives by the parties to a conflict.

Council commended members of the international community for their continued assistance to refugee education and urged them to further enhance their support, as well as to avail their funding commitments in a timely and sustainable manner. Council appealed to the international community to continue to support the national plans of AU Member States for the education of refugees and displaced children.

Council encouraged the Chairperson of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons to continue to work closely with the Council and also with all relevant AU Partners and international stakeholders in addressing the issue of education of refugees and displaced children in Africa.

Council requested relevant specialized technical committees, particularly those dealing with education and humanitarian issues, to discuss and propose practical recommendations on the education of refugees and displaced children in particular regarding access to quality education and curriculum development, the development of refugee education action plans, education fund and responsibility sharing for refugees .

Council requested the AU Commission to expedite the preparation of the evaluation report on the implementation of its previous decisions on women and children in armed conflicts to enable Council to determine further steps to address the persistent challenges.

Council, once again, reiterated its call to the Chairperson of the Commission to appoint a Special Envoy for Children in Armed conflict.

Council requested the ACERWC to report, regularly to Council on the plight of children in armed conflicts in Africa.

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.