INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the African Union (AU) in the year 2002 from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was initiated with the intention to create continental unity. The new organisation envisaged human rights content, a peace and security architecture and absolutely committed to non-interference in internal affairs of states. These changes were made by explicit promises towards the promotion and protection of Human Rights according to the African Charter on the Human and People’s Rights and other relevant rights structures. This formation and gradual development of the Union signalled a modest beginning for the African Union populations and the leadership to confront the devastating effects of conflict and other related problems. The Union also succeeded an organisation that was widely criticised for its inability to mediate the Continent’s conflicts. Therefore, its formation meant that the Union would be more functional, effective and proactive in responding to problems on the Continent¹.

The creation of the AU was an important milestone towards the development of meaningful collective security architecture among African Member States and Regional Mechanisms. The AU has been instrumental in establishing a security management system that includes the Peace and Security Council (PSC) with most of its supporting mechanisms in the process of being fully

operationalised. African Union institutions which include the Peace and Security Council, (PSC), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), and the Panel of the Wise, just to name a few, have increasingly played crucial roles in conflict prevention and peacemaking missions. As such, the continental body has demonstrated a keen resolve and potential to promote stability, prevent conflicts, facilitate peace processes, and support post-conflict reconstruction activities.

Despite these developments, and also ten years after the creation of the Union, Africa continues to suffer from a wide array of conflicts, some of them violent in nature. These conflicts have also tended not only to curtail peace but also to hinder the continent’s development plans and strategies. In 2011, Africa witnessed an uprising in North Africa emerging from confrontations by the masses demanding changes to the way governments are run, demanding positive changes in lives and the restructuring of systems that had long benefited the elite. On the other side Mali—although a country that had showed considerable progress in peace and security; together with Guinea-Bissau experienced coups in the year 2012, while peace and order for Somalia has remained a military priority for Uganda, Burundi and Kenya. Also, despite advances in education and economic growth, progress remains fragile.

The uprisings in North Africa highlighted one of the most influential and untapped resource, i.e. the youth. About 70 percent of Africa’s population are under the age of 30 constituting the youth. Of this population, the youth face major difficulties and inequalities are widespread. Young Africans face major difficulties in finding decent employment and participating in decision-making processes. The youth also face distinct risks in situations of conflicts where they are recruited into fighting forces, becoming targets for sexual violence and missing out on opportunities to access education. The youth are also constantly used as perpetrators of conflicts and civil disorder and continue to be the most vulnerable and most affected in post conflict communities.\(^2\)

The African Union has also had to intervene in most of these conflicts in the quest to maintain peace on the Continent. However, the Union has encountered many challenges and successes on the way. In some instances, the Union has been commended for intervening and resolving the conflicts peacefully while in some, for example the crisis in Libya saw the Union facing major criticism concerning the way the conflict was responded to.

Against this background, the AU has over the past three years developed a culture of convening High Level Retreats, which provide the opportunity to concertedly and holistically focus on emerging challenges in the continent. Following the first AU High Level Retreat, which took place in Cairo, Egypt, from 26-28 August 2010, the African Union made a Cairo Call for Peace which called for the institutionalization of such initiatives. At the second AU High Level Retreat in 2011, participants stressed the need not only to strengthen existing frameworks of good governance but also called for operationalisation of existing instruments. The conclusion of the retreat witnessed a call to the African Union to fully support ongoing transition processes in North Africa to ensure that the quest for democracy and good governance is met. One of the outcomes of the retreat was the Cairo Declaration, which reiterated the need for renewed efforts by different actors and stakeholders in governance to address implementation gaps.

This year’s Retreat coincides with the 10th anniversary of the AU, and offers an opportunity for the African Union to review the achievements made in the area of peace and security during the first decade, and to reflect upon emerging challenges. The Retreat will also afford the AU and its strategic partners the opportunity to consider ways to transform the African peace and security landscape towards the objective of a conflict-free Africa. Furthermore, it is expected that the Retreat will contribute to the examination of past performance and the anticipation of future trends and developments, on the occasion of the upcoming celebration of the OAU’s 50th anniversary in 2013.

Background

The 2010 AU High-Level Retreat was held during the Africa Year of Peace and Security and in support of International Peace Day. The meeting was the first ever gathering of such a wide range of actors involved in peacemaking and mediation in Africa. Participants critically assessed peacemaking efforts in Africa, identified gaps in capacity as well as concrete steps to strengthen ongoing peace processes. In addition, participants engaged with experts to discuss common thematic challenges such as unconstitutional changes of government; election-related violence; justice and reconciliation; disarmament and security; and natural resources. An outcome of the 2010 meeting was the creation of working groups which were task with analysing specific conflict situations such as Somalia, Sudan/Darfur, the Great Lakes Region, West Africa, Western Sahara and the Sahelian Belt, with a view to formulating practical recommendations to strengthen the peace efforts. The meeting resulted in a formal Call for Peace which was endorsed by all participants. The 2010 AU High Level Retreat was held in collaboration with the
Government of Egypt, and with the support of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolutions of Disputes (ACCORD), the Cairo Regional Centre for Training on Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA).

In 2011, the AU convened the second High Level Retreat from 4 - 5 September 2011, in Cairo. The overall theme of the 2011 AU High-Level Retreat was: “**Strengthening Political Governance for Peace, Security and Stability in Africa**, primarily as an opportunity to respond to challenges of the peace and security landscape in Africa.” The 2011 AU High-Level Retreat built on the momentum that was created in 2010 and capitalized on the successful co-operation between the AU and partners in carrying out the spirit and goals of the 2010 High Level forward.

This year’s Retreat offers an opportunity for the African Union to acknowledge the progress it has made since its inception and to reflect upon the many challenges that the Continent faces, and take the necessary steps to address these threats to peace and security.

Through sharing experiences, challenges and solutions, it is hoped the retreat will strengthen African peacemaking efforts and enhance the collaboration between the AU, RECs, and other multilateral partners, such as the UN, EU, OIF, the League of Arab States, etc. It is also envisaged that the retreat will serve as a forum where practitioners and policy makers can bring their accumulated knowledge to bear in discussions to find solutions to some of the intractable conflicts on the continent.

**Objectives**

The Retreat will have the following specific objectives:

- To reflect on the experiences of the African Union in operationalising its vision and goals since its inception;

- To examine the conflict trends and dynamics on the continent;

- To review the approaches towards operationalising the peace and security architecture of the African Union, and the related opportunities and challenges;

- To review the peacemaking, mediation and conflict management efforts of the African Union since its inception; and

- To examine lessons drawn from years of operation, including discussing weaknesses and identifying opportunities to be more proactive towards preventing conflicts from escalating into violence;
- To provide a platform to discuss coordination and collaboration of conflict prevention and mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts between the AU and RECs and to develop more coordinated and collaborative mechanisms for addressing peace and security challenges in Africa.

Expected outcomes

The 2012 AU Cairo High-Level Retreat will have the following outcomes:

- Enhanced understanding of threats to peace and security on the continent and more informed efforts towards responding to these;
- Enhanced support and political will towards efforts to promote peace and security in the continent;
- Clearly defined recommendations for enhancing the Africa Union Peace and Security Architecture;
- Established recommendations in terms of strengthening partnerships that will bring together the AU, UN, RECs and international partners (particularly in support of the African Solidarity Initiative for post-conflict reconstruction and development);
- Documented shared experiences between African Union mediators towards promoting peace and security in Africa;
- Outcome statement from the meeting.

Timing, venue and participation

The Retreat will take place on 5–6 November, in Cairo, Egypt. Approximately 200 participants will be brought together to deliberate on the highlighted issues. Participants will include senior officials of the AU Commission and Special Envoys/Representatives of the AU, the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms, the United Nations, the European Union, the League of Arab States, other multilateral organisations, as well as representatives of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), and selected bilateral partners.

Structure of the High Level Retreat
The retreat will be conducted in two formats, namely plenary integrated sessions as well as parallel session:

- **Plenary sessions** will enable high level speakers to address participants on political developments and challenges which require attention. Discussions will first be led by experts, with eminent facilitators leading discussions followed by the presenters’ engagement discussants who will then react to the groundbreaking presentations by experts. This would be followed opportunities for delegates to engage with the panellists through Question and Answer segments.

- **Parallel sessions** will allow participants to participate in presentations relating to topics of their interest. Speakers will analyse experiences and strategies on significant conflicts and issues that generate conflict.

- **Excursion:** Possibly participants will be taken to the pyramids

All discussions will be subject to the **Chatham House rule** to promote openness and confidentiality. The aim should be to use formats that enable participants to exchange opinions as openly as possible, avoiding lengthy presentations and maximising time for practical discussions.

Overall, presentations will draw on a number of case-specific experiences, focusing on the concrete issues and challenges peacemakers have to cope with when working on governance related crises.