The Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts Calls on Mozambique to Strengthen National Efforts Aimed at Protecting Children in Situations of Conflict

The Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP CAAC) has called on the Government of Mozambique to continue to lead efforts in promoting the rights of children affected by armed conflict. The AP CAAC delegation urged the authorities in Mozambique to work closely and in synergy with crucial stakeholders across government institutions and international and civil society organizations to protect children and vulnerable persons in conflict situations. The delegation undertook a solidarity mission to the Republic of Mozambique from 28 to 30 November 2022, where it commended the Government for efforts towards addressing the security and humanitarian situations mainly affecting the Northern part of the country.

The delegation was led by H.E. Jainaba Jagne, Permanent Representative of the Gambia to the African Union (AU) cum Co-Chair of the AP CAAC, and comprised H.E. Crisantos Obama Ondo, Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea to the AU, representatives of the Ambassadors of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Mauritania, Nigeria and the AU Commission, as well as the secretariat of the Platform, represented by Ms Doris Mpoumou, Director of Save the Children Liaison Office to the AU. The mission engaged with critical stakeholders in Mozambique, including representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action, the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Human Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Secretariat of State for Youth and Employment.

The delegation, which paid a courtesy call at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was also received by Dr Fortunato De Oliveira, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action. The mission commended national efforts in promoting research and evidence-based decision-making, highlighted the importance of policy and normative frameworks in addressing child protection issues and endorsed a multi-sectoral approach to child protection, community resilience building against conflicts, tackling premature unions, aka child marriages, and mitigating budgetary challenges.

At the Ministry of Health, the delegation met with Dr Quinhas Fernandes, the National Director of Public Health. The discussions highlighted the need for continuity of healthcare services, including during emergencies and conflict situations, as part of efforts to mitigate the impact of these situations on access to healthcare services for children and other vulnerable persons.

At the Ministry of Education and Human Development, discussions underscored the need for collective and coordinated efforts in protecting schools against violent attacks.
and ensuring continuity of education despite the challenges posed by armed conflict and terrorism, as well as the need for AU Member States to share best practices on the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. The mission also met with Ms Ivete Ferrão Alane, Permanent Secretary at the Secretariat of State for Youth and Employment, where youth participation in program planning and implementation, protection, prevention, and mitigation of the effects of terrorism, especially on internally displaced persons (IDPs) was underscored.

At the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, the mission was received by Mr Dionisio Macule, National Director for Human Rights, where the in-depth exchanges explored options for judicial reforms towards strengthening accountability and other mechanisms for the protection of children in conflict situations. The delegation commended the Government's efforts to promote children's rights and called for more action to protect children in conflict situations.

It must be recalled that the mission aimed to support the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Mozambique and other stakeholders to promote the welfare of children affected by armed conflicts, provide a high-level platform to build on efforts rallying international support for the children in Mozambique, and to provide technical support to stakeholders towards enhancing the rights and welfare of children in conflict situations, in line with the objectives of the AP CAAC, to engage and sustain advocacy for the protection of children in conflict and humanitarian crises on the continent.

The Platform aims to protect children from the six grave violations against children in armed conflicts identified by United Nations through policymaking and reporting at the AU level. These include the killing and maiming of children, the recruitment or use of children as soldiers, sexual violations, abduction, attacks against schools or hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. It must be noted that the AP CAAC promotes the mainstreaming of children's rights and the Children Affected by Armed Conflicts agenda in the AU Commission and the Member States, together with relevant mechanisms like the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In this regard, the AP CAAC continues to work closely with Member States to address the humanitarian situations affecting the protection of children's rights and welfare.

The Platform, therefore, undertook this inaugural mission to Mozambique as part of a series of field visits to various AU Member States aimed at supporting and advocating for the welfare of children in situations of conflict in Africa, including by conducting consultations with children to ensure their best interests, concerns and recommendations are well reflected in policy outcomes and further implemented. Furthermore, the Platform will also visit Member States in post-conflict situations to learn the best practices on the programmes put in place to rehabilitate and re-integrate children affected by armed conflict and explore funding mechanisms, among others, to recommend suitable measures for countries which are experiencing armed conflicts.

The AP CAAC commended the Republic of Mozambique for being a party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and for endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD). The field mission advocated for the
implementation of the ACRWC and the domestic implementation of the SSD and its guidelines. Lessons learnt from the field consultations are expected to improve the protection of children in conflict situations in the Member States by enhancing a shared understanding of collective responsibilities by relevant actors towards taking concrete measures to entrench the safety of children in conflict situations.

It should be recalled that the AP CAAC Platform was inaugurated on the 23rd of September 2021. The Platform brings together individual AU Ambassadors and key child protection stakeholders committed to engaging and sustaining advocacy for the protection of children in humanitarian situations during armed conflicts in Africa. Ambassador Jainaba Jagne, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Gambia to the AU and Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, co-chair the Platform.

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