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**PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL**
**1202ND MEETING**

**27 FEBRUARY 2024**
**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**PSC/PR/COMM.1202.2 (2024)**

# COMMUNIQUÉ

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**Adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 1202nd meeting held on 27 February 2024, on the Fight Against the Use of Child Soldiers.**

**The Peace and Security Council,**

***Recalling*** Decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.718 (XXXII)] adopted by the 32nd Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government 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 Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) mechanisms for the protection of children in situations of conflict;

***Further recalling*** all previous decisions and pronouncements on the plight of children in armed conflicts and related themes, particularly, Communiqués PSC/PR/COMM.1110 (2022) adopted at its 1110th meeting held on 5 October 2022;

***Deeply concerned*** by the increasingly asymmetrical nature of armed conflicts on the Continent, including the rise in violent extremism and terrorist attacks, as well as emerging unconventional threats to peace and security on the Continent resulting in increased vulnerability of children to the grave violations of their rights in situations of conflict particularly to the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups;

***Noting*** the opening remarks by H.E Mohammed Arrouchi, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the AU and the Chairperson of the PSC for February 2024, the statement by H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security and Co-chair of the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP CAAC), read on his behalf by Dr. Isabela Warioba, the statement by H.E. Ambassador Jainaba Jagne, Permanent Representative of the Republic of The Gambia to the AU and Co-chair of the AP CAAC, and the statements by Honorable Robert Nanima, Special Rapporteur on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts and member of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC); ***Also noting*** the statements by the representatives of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Save the Children, as well as by Professor Abdelkader Filali, Moroccan Professor and Expert on the fight against the use of child soldiers; and

**Acting under Article 7 of its Protocol, the Peace and Security Council:**

1. ***Commemorates*** the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, also known as Red Hand Day, which is marked yearly on 12 February;

2. ***Condemns in the strongest terms*** the continued recruitment and use of children on the continent by all belligerents to a conflict, including non-state armed groups and forces, as well as terrorist organisations, for either direct participation in hostilities or any other purposes, and ***emphasizes*** the need for Member States to take robust punitive measures against all perpetrators of violations and abuses against children, including state and non-state actors;

3. ***Reiterates*** the need to comprehensively address the structural root causes of conflict as a sustainable solution for the prevention of the recruitment and use of children by all parties in situations of armed conflict, as well as the need for mainstreaming child protection in early warning mechanisms and conflict prevention, peace-making and peacebuilding processes and post-conflict reconstruction;



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4. ***Encourages*** Member States to treat children involved in armed conflict primarily as victims and take appropriate steps to prevent the detention or prosecution of children for alleged involvement with armed groups, including all non-State armed groups and those designated as terrorist groups; ***also encourages*** Member States to develop handover protocols to ensure that children taken into military custody are transferred to civilian child protection authorities for rehabilitation and community reintegration;

5. ***Emphasizes*** the need for mainstreaming child protection in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes to ensure the establishment of a child-friendly environment that prioritizes children's needs and ensures equal access to girl-mothers, girl victims of sexual violence, and girls formerly associated with combatants in all aspects of the DDR process; and in this regard, ***requests*** the AU Commission to review the DDR Guidelines for children in line with the evolving context of the continent, with a view to effectively curbing re-recruitment of children by armed groups;

6. ***Underlines*** the need for appropriate programmes for the effective reintegration of former child soldiers, including the provision of psycho-social support; ***emphasizes*** the imperative of developing a child-sensitive social protection framework for children in conflict settings to address the underlying causes of vulnerability; and in this regard, ***requests*** the AU Commission, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to develop a Continental Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Framework to address the psychosocial wellbeing of children in conflict settings, including those formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups;

7. ***Underscores*** the need for all stakeholders to employ a sustainable and holistic approach to child protection, including ensuring that local structures have the expertise and capacities to develop and maintain child protection measures throughout the preparation and implementation of child protection programs with the prevention of recruitment of children as the overarching aim;

8. ***Calls on*** Member States which have not yet done so to sign, ratify and domesticate the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other international instruments such as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child with regard to inclusion of children in armed conflicts;

9. ***Underlines*** the importance of the adoption of a holistic and plural approach, both global and local, theoretical and practical, which combines fight and prevention to deal with the scourge of Child soldiers;

10. ***Underscores*** the need for governments and all other stakeholders to design prevention programmes targeting the most vulnerable children, such as displaced children, street children and children in conflict with the law, as they may be more susceptible to recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups;

11. ***Encourages*** all international partners and philanthropists to commit more funding for flexible and easily accessible programmes that consider the specific needs of children;

12. ***Also encourages*** Member States to invest in education, which is instrumental for the prevention of the recruitment and use of children and the successful reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups; ***welcomes*** the theme of the Day of the African Child 2024 – "Education for all children in Africa: the time is now";

13. ***Urges*** Member States to ensure the safety of schools and to prevent them from being used for military purposes; in this context, ***further encourages*** Member States to facilitate the continuation of education even in situations of conflicts, including through signing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration, for those yet to do so;

14. ***Appeals*** to Member States to cooperate in developing prevention programs targeting border areas, coordinate responses and share information between agencies on each side of a border in order to prevent cross-border recruitment and use of children;

15. ***Encourages*** the AU Commission, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts to keep engaging and supporting Member States to eliminate violations against children in conflict situations, including the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups;

16. ***Requests*** the AU Commission to operationalize the Child Protection Architecture as a convening platform to coordinate existing initiatives of relevant actors in the realm of protecting children's rights in situations of conflict, thereby prompting a continental approach which aims to trigger an integrated response to the multi-dimensional challenges faced by children in conflict situations;

17. ***Underscores*** the imperative to put an end to impunity for those responsible for the recruitment and criminal use of children and other serious violations against them and ***calls for*** the immediate and unconditional release of all children under detention in contexts of armed conflicts;

18. ***Requests*** the AU Commission to develop a best practice document of reference to prevent and end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed groups;

19. ***Welcomes and endorses*** the Conclusions of the Ministerial High-Level Open Session on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights and Welfare of Children in Situations of Armed Conflicts held in Banjul, The Gambia, from 4 to 5 December 2023**;**

20. ***Reiterates the request*** for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint a Special Envoy on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts in Africa to facilitate the effective implementation of the AU Child Rights and Protection Agenda; and

21. ***Decides*** to remain actively seized of the matter.

**African Union Commission (AUC)**

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PSC Outcomes Communiqués

2024-02-27

# Communiqué of the 1202nd Meeting of the Peace and Security Council held on 27 February 2024 on the Fight Against the Use of Child Soldiers.

Peace and Security Council

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