

# Consideration of Policies on Child Protection in AU PSOs and Mainstreaming Child Protection in APSA

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Tomorrow (29 March 2022) the African Union (AU) Peace Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1070<sup>th</sup> session to consider two policies aimed at ensuring protection of children affected by armed conflicts – the draft policy on child protection in AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) and the draft policy on mainstreaming child protection in the African peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

Following opening remarks by Mafa M. Sejanamane, Permanent Representative of Lesotho to the AU and the Chairperson of the PSC for the month of March, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), is expected to make a statement. Cessouma Minata Samate, Commissioner of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS) is also expected to make remarks. Other expected participants include representatives of AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) and invited members of the international community and partners represented in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Tomorrow's session forms part of Council's annual agenda item on the theme of protection of children affected by armed conflicts (CAAC). While Council has been addressing the issue of children affected by conflict and crises situations since 2010, CAAC was institutionalised and regularised within Council's agenda following the decision of its 420<sup>th</sup> session held in 2014, where Council undertook to dedicate annual

sessions on the theme.

It is to be recalled that at its 994<sup>th</sup> session on CAAC, Council requested the AU Commission to “institutionalize a child protection architecture within the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and develop a policy aimed at mainstreaming child protection in all phases of intervention from conflict prevention and mediation to conflict management”. Tomorrow’s session is expected to be a follow up of this decision and an opportunity for Council to be updated on the status of the draft policy on child protection in AU PSOs and the draft policy on mainstreaming child protection in APSA.

The policy on mainstreaming child protection in APSA is drafted with the main purpose of outlining the process through which child protection should be integrated into the various policies, procedures and practices of APSA Pillars and how it should be implemented throughout all areas of APSA, from conflict prevention, to management and resolution and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. The policy was drafted as part of efforts geared towards the development of a child protection architecture within APSA, in line with Assembly/AU/Dec.718(XXXII). The Assembly, at its 32<sup>nd</sup> Ordinary Session, mandated the AU Commission to “develop a child protection architecture for the Continent as a sub-aspect of APSA, to be considered and adopted by the PSC”. The Assembly’s decision was informed by and represented endorsement of the PSC’s recommendation at its 706<sup>th</sup> session, for the establishment of a child protection architecture within the AU Commission. The establishment of such architecture is mainly aimed at enhancing coordination and complementarity between various normative frameworks, institutions and mechanisms of the AU which are relevant for protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of children in situations of armed conflicts.

The drafting of the policy on child protection in AU PSOs was initiated upon the request of the AU Assembly at its 33<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session, for the AU Commission to “develop a comprehensive policy on child protection in AU peace support operations” (Assembly/AU/Dec.753(XXXIII)). The Assembly’s request for the development of a policy tailored specifically to AU PSOs was aimed at addressing the existing lack of guiding rules and principles for PSOs, in their interactions with children they encounter under various circumstances in situations of armed conflicts. Such encounters may vary from confrontations with child soldiers to coming across unaccompanied minors or children victimised by sexual abuse. The central purpose of the policy on child protection in AU PSOs is therefore to ensure that AU PSOs are trained and capacitated both pre-deployment and in-mission, on how to contribute to the prevention, response and remedy of violations against the rights and wellbeing of children in conflict situations. To that end, the policy is guided by regional and international human rights and humanitarian law standards on the protection of children at times of armed conflicts.

Through its multiple sessions convened over the years on the CAAC theme, the PSC has contributed significantly for the development of these two important policies. Mainly, the Council has played a critical role in identifying the need for such policies by drawing attention at its various sessions, to the areas of AU’s peace and security efforts which require to adopt approaches that take into consideration the specific needs of children in conflict settings. For instance, at its 491<sup>st</sup> session convened on 9 March 2015, the PSC stressed the need for both pre-deployment and in-mission trainings for AU PSO personnel, on prevention and combating of sexual exploitation and abuse of children in conflict situations. At its 757<sup>th</sup> session held on 13 March 2018 Council further pointed out the importance of ensuring that protection of children is

addressed systematically throughout the “design and mandate implementation stages of AU PSOs”. It further emphasised at that session, the need of mainstreaming the wellbeing of children into relevant components of AU peacekeeping policies, strategies, training and briefing programmes.

Once adopted, both policies are intended to require mandatory compliance. This would be essential to ensure that all personnel of AU authorised, mandated or endorsed PSOs and those deployed within regional arrangements of the various RECs/RMs, as well as policy and decision makers within the structure of APSA are well sensitised, trained and capacitated to carefully assess and take into account, the specific circumstances of children in conflict situations while discharging their various duties. By doing so, the two policies will not only ensure the protection of the rights and welfare of children affected by conflicts, but also contribute to building sustainable and intergenerational peace and security on the continent.

The expected outcome of tomorrow’s session is a communique. The PSC is expected to consider and reflect on the adoption of the two instruments. Council is expected to commend the AU Commission for collaborating with relevant stakeholders in the development of the policies. In addition to discussing the two policies on child protection, Council may also follow up on the status of implementation of some of the other key decisions of its 994<sup>th</sup> session, including its call for the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) to work towards establishing a “child protection situation room” which would allow timely and coordinated response to the plight of children in conflict settings. It may reiterate its call for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint a Special Envoy on Children, Peace and Security. Council may also welcome the formation of the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP-CAAC) and commend the AU Commission for setting up this

mechanism which is intended to strengthen advocacy and development of policies aimed at addressing the plight of children in conflict situations. It may also urge member States to sign, ratify and implement regional and international instruments relevant for the protection of children both in peace time and during armed conflicts.