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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

434<sup>TH</sup> MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

8 MAY 2014

PSC/PR/BR.(CDXXXIV)

**PRESS STATEMENT**

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The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), at its 434<sup>th</sup> meeting, held an open session, on 8 May 2014, devoted to the theme: “Children in Armed Conflicts in Africa: Briefing by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)”. The meeting was a follow-up to the 420<sup>th</sup> meeting of the PSC, held in Addis Ababa, on 18 February 2014 with the ACERWC, which highlighted the urgent need to respect children’s rights, especially in countries experiencing conflicts.

Council received statements from H.E Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security; H.E. Martial de Paul Ikounga, AU Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, in his capacity as the Acting AU Commissioner for Social Affairs; Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Chairperson of ACERWC; Madam Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children in Armed Conflicts; Ms. Leila Pakkala, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa; Mr. John Graham, Country Director of Save the Children; as well as Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh, a former child soldier. Statements were also received from representatives of AU Member States, bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as representatives of civil society organizations.

Recalling Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI), adopted in June 2012, at its 21<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Session, held in Addis Ababa, in which the Executive Council requested the PSC to take into account the rights of the child in its agenda and cooperate actively with the ACERWC, in its efforts aimed at promoting the welfare of children in Africa, participants commended the Council for devoting an open session on Children in Armed Conflicts in Africa and encouraged the Council to regularize such sessions.

Participants and Council acknowledged that despite the global engagement towards the protection of children affected by armed conflict and the progress achieved to strengthen the existing legal frameworks, grave child rights violations remain an urgent and serious concern in African countries affected by conflict. Furthermore, the implementation of these instruments and turning commitments into concrete action still remains a daunting challenge across the continent. In this regard, the meeting emphasized that it is the primary responsibility of governments to ensure that children are protected and that their rights and welfare are promoted. Furthermore, they urged all AU Member States, which have not yet done so, to ratify and fully implement the relevant AU and other international child protection, rights and welfare instruments.

Participants and Council concurred that providing direct services such as learning and psycho-social support; capacity building for duty bearers including governments ministries, police,

community-based child protection networks; building partnerships with community-based structures; and prioritizing children's participation in their own protection, were all at the center of ensuring the protection of children in armed conflicts on the continent.

Participants and Council expressed sympathy to the families of more than 200 Nigerian girls who were abducted from their school in north-eastern Nigeria and to the Federal Government of Nigeria. They urged those responsible for their abduction to immediately release them unharmed and for the Nigerian authorities to ensure that they are successfully re-united with their families. In this regard, Participants and Council called for concerted efforts to prevent violations of children's rights and the need for AU Member States to take robust punitive measures against the perpetrators of violations against children.

Participants and Council stressed the need for governments to institutionalize the protection of children within their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) programmes, as well as to include rehabilitation of former child soldiers particularly in countries emerging from conflicts.

In accordance with both continental and international instruments, particularly Article 22 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Participants and Council called on all State and Non-State actors to strictly adhere to International Humanitarian Law. In this regard, Participants and Council welcomed the Declaration signed in September 2013 between the AU and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflicts, to mainstream the protection of children in all peace and security activities of the AU. Participants also welcomed the steps being undertaken by the AU in mainstreaming child protection activities in its peace support operations.

Participants and Council called on AU Member States to extend a standing invitation to the ACERWC to visit their respective countries and to collaborate with the Committee to ensure that there is no impunity to the violation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Participants and Council welcomed the 'Children, Not Soldiers' Campaign by the SRSG and UNICEF aimed at ending the recruitment of children by government forces by 2016 and called on the SRSG/CAAC, the AUC and the ACERWC to develop a partnership for the success of this Campaign.

Participants and Council recommended the appointment of an AU Special Envoy for Children in Africa to sustain efforts in the protection of children's rights in the context of armed conflict on the continent. They also called for further strengthening of the capacity of the ACERWC, as well as for the re-doubling of efforts in mobilizing funding for child protection related activities including within the framework of the 2013-2023 Plan of Action. In the same vein, they stressed

the need for building the capacity of child protection centres and the establishment of new ones where they do not yet exist.

Council welcomed the call for regularizing an Open Session dedicated to protection of children's rights in the context of armed conflict and echoed the need to ensure an Africa- Fit –For Children;

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.