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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
491ST MEETING
9 MARCH 2015
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PSC/PR/BR.(CDXCI)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), at its 491st meeting held on 9 March 2015, devoted an Open Session on the theme: “Vulnerability of Women and Children in conflict situations in Africa”. The meeting was held pursuant to the decision adopted by Council at its 223rd meeting held on 30 March 2010. The meeting also commemorated the 15th Anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which was initiated by the Republic of Namibia and the 5th anniversary of the Decade for African Women (2010-2020) which was launched on 15 October 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya and subsequently endorsed by the 16th Ordinary Session of the Union, Assembly/AU/Dec.333(XVI), held in January 2011, as well as celebrating the African Year of Women’s Empowerment as endorsed by the 24th Ordinary Session of the Union held in Addis Ababa in January 2015.

Council took note of the statement made by the Chairperson of the Peace and security Council, Ambassador Anne Namakau Mutelo, Permanent Representative of Namibia to the AU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the presentations made by the representatives from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV), based in South Africa and the Director and Representative to the AU of Save the Children in Addis Ababa, as well as interventions made by AU Member States and partners, as well as civil society organizations and think tanks.

Council recalled its earlier pronouncements on the issue of women and children in conflicts situations and noted with concern the impact of conflict-related sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuses (SEA). Council and Participants further noted with concern the persistence of vulnerability of women and girls, as well as boys, to sexual violence, which claims the lives of innocent people and results in serious and irreparable consequences for the survivors, their families and communities. Council and Participants acknowledged that there are already several AU instruments in place which are designed to protect women and children and called for their effective implementation.

Council and Participants acknowledged the progress made by AU Member States and partners in the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and Resolution 1612 on children and armed conflicts. Council and Participants stressed that despite the progress made, women and children continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in conflict situations and called for AU Members States to redouble their efforts to ensure that their national laws match the provisions of UNSC Resolution 1325 and other international instruments that protect the rights of women and children.

Council and Participants strongly condemned the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and emphasized the need to fight impunity in cases of sexual violence and rape in situations of

conflict and stressed the need to hold accountable perpetrators of these acts. Council and Participants further strongly condemned the recruitment and use of child soldiers by parties to armed conflicts in violation of international obligations applicable to them and all other violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflicts. Council and Participants emphasized the responsibility of Member States for ensuring the protection of women and children in situations where they are threatened or affected by violence, in line with relevant AU and international instruments.

Council and Participants recognized the growing evidence that increasing the participation of women in peace processes and other critical sectors greatly enhance conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation processes, reconciliation and responses to the needs of women and the population at large.

Council and Participants stressed the need to seize every opportunity to mainstream gender into the African peace and security agenda and to promote women's empowerment and contributions. While the number of women among the uniformed personnel - military and police forces remains limited, active steps should be taken by peacekeeping missions to increase the number of civilian positions held by women. Council and Participants recognized the growing awareness that increasing the presence of women in peacekeeping and other critical actors greatly enhance conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation processes and ensure that the needs of women and population at large are integrated in the negotiations and peace agreements.

Council and Participants stressed the need to provide funding and capacity building to women on peace and security issues to be acquainted with peace and security knowledge, which will enable them to fully and effectively participate in conflict prevention, management, mediation, reconciliation, peacebuilding, as well as in post-conflict reconstruction and development.

Council and Participants underlined the importance of both pre-deployment and in-mission trainings on the prevention and combating of SEA for personnel deployed in AU-led peace support operations, to reduce sexual exploitation and gender-based violence and achieve more effective protection of women and children affected by conflicts.

Council and Participants stressed the need to seize every opportunity to mainstream gender into the African peace and security agenda, increase the representation of women in decision-making processes and promote women's empowerment in the economic sector.

Council reiterated the fact that a focus on women and children brings into sharp perspective the wider human security dimensions of the AU peace and security agenda, as articulated in the Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defense and Security Policy (CADSP), adopted by the 2nd Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held on 28 February 2004, to the extent that conflict in Africa cannot be delinked from the challenges of reducing poverty and

promoting health, development and education, especially as the OAU/AU celebrated, in May 2013, its 50th Anniversary of tackling these very challenges.

Council and Participants stressed the need for parties to a conflict to facilitate humanitarian assistance to ensure that health infrastructures for women and children is not destroyed. Where access to health services, such as immunization, is hindered by conflict, governments and parties to the conflicts should facilitate humanitarian ceasefire and corridors to enable access.

Council and Participants emphasized the need to include children's interests in peace agreements. Council and Participants noted that since 1999, several peace agreements have specifically referred to children in the post-violence arrangements for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Children are recognized as victims and perpetrators of violence in several truth and reconciliation commissions, but children have not received commensurate attention to address their plight.

Council and Participants acknowledged the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the promotion of peace and security in Africa, and urged them to ensure that women, as well as gender related issues, including sexual atrocities against women and men, girls and boys, are adequately addressed. Council and Participants also called on the CSOs to play a more active role and engage in advocacy, reporting infringements on women and children's rights.

Council commended the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr. Nkhosazana Dlamini Zuma, for her tremendous efforts on the protection of women and children in conflict situations and for the appointment of Ms. Bineta Diop, as Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the Commission on Women, Peace and Security. In this regard, Council requested the Chairperson of the Commission, to appoint a special envoy on children, peace and security, to ensure more attention and action on issues of child rights, safety, health, education and protection, particularly in conflict situations.

Council urged all Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify, without any further delay, the relevant AU instruments, notably the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) and the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (2009), as well as other relevant international instruments. Council stressed the need for renewed efforts towards the implementation of these instruments, as well as of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2005) and the UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.