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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

615TH MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

9 AUGUST 2016

PSC/PR/BR. (DCXV)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), held its 615th meeting on 9 August 2016, which was dedicated to an open session on the theme: “Education of Refugees and Displaced Children in Africa”.

Council received a presentation from the Department of Political Affairs of the AU Commission. Council also listened to statements delivered by two representatives of refugee children from the Tierkidi Refugee Camp in Gambella, Ethiopia, from the Chair of the AU Permanent Representatives’ Committee (PRC) Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, as well as from representatives of AU Member States, AU partners, international organizations and civil society organizations.

Council recalled all its previous decisions and pronouncements on the plight of children in armed conflicts, particularly, Press Statements [PSC/PR/BR. (DXCVII)] and [PSC/PR/BR. (CDXCI)] adopted at its 597th and 491st open session meetings, held on 10 May 2016 and on 9 March 2015, respectively.

Council expressed deep concern over the growing number of refugees and displaced children in Africa. Council, once again, stressed that education was a basic and fundamental right for all children, including to refugees and displaced children as enshrined in various continental and international human rights normative frameworks, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problem in Africa, the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child and the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

Council underscored the importance of effectively addressing the root causes of forced displacement. In this context, Council urged Member States that are still facing conflict and crisis situations to expeditiously find consensual means and ways of effectively resolving these conflicts and crises, as well to protect children from all forms of violence and exploitation.

Council commended all Member States that are currently hosting refugees in their countries. In this context, Council laid emphasis on the importance of providing safe environments for inclusive and quality education to refugee children consistent with relevant continental and international normative frameworks for refugees and children.

Council stressed the importance of expediting the implementation of all existing AU and other relevant international instruments relating to the rights and welfare of all children, including refugee and displaced children. In this context, Council urged all AU Member States, which have not yet done so, to sign, ratify and fully domesticate all relevant AU and other international child protection instruments. Furthermore, Council requested the AU Commission, within the framework of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2015-2025, to work closely with Member States to address gaps in education policies at national, regional and continental levels, while ensuring that systems are put in place to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these policies.

Council, once again, called on all Member States in conflict situations to comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and to ensure that schools are not attacked and used for military purposes. In this context, Council welcomed the initiatives taken by some Member States to promote and protect the right of children to education and to facilitate the continuation of education even in situations of armed conflicts. Council further encouraged all Member States that have not yet done so, to sign the 'Safe Schools' Declaration.

Council urged Member States and development partners to ensure that education is not treated as part of humanitarian assistance only, but also as part of the national development agenda and as a long term investment. Council underscored the importance of education of refugees and IDPs, as a tool to build peace and cohesion, as well as prevent their conscription into armed groups, prevent them from human trafficking and smuggling, violent extremism and radicalization.

Council commended members of the international donor community for their continued assistance to refugee education and urged them to further enhance their assistance, as well as to avail their funding commitments in a timely and sustainable manner. Council appealed to the international community to continue to support the national plans of AU Member States for the education of refugees and displaced children.

Council encouraged the Chairperson of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons to continue to work closely with the Council and also with all relevant AU Partners and international stakeholders in addressing the issue of education of refugees and displaced children in Africa.

Council requested relevant specialized technical committees, particularly those dealing with education and humanitarian issues, to discuss and propose practical recommendations on

the education of refugees and displaced children in particular regarding access to quality education, curriculum development and examination which includes the collaboration between Member States hosting refugees and the refugee's countries of origin, the development of refugee education action plans, education fund and responsibility sharing for refugees .

Council reiterated its request for the AU Commission to include as part of the Report of the PSC on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa, to be submitted to the next ordinary session of the AU Assembly to be held in January 2017 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a section dedicated to refugees and displaced children, as well as children affected by armed conflicts.

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.