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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
757TH MEETING
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
13 MARCH 2018

PSC/PR/BR.(DCCLVII)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), at its 757th meeting held on 13 March 2018, dedicated an open session to the theme: 'The plight of women and children in conflict situations in Africa'.

Council took note of the statements that were delivered by the Ag. Director for Peace and Security Department, Dr. Admore Kambudzi, the Director for Women, Gender and Development, Ms Mahawa Kaba Wheeler and by the representative of the United Nations Office to the African Union, Nathalie Ndongo-She. Council also took note of the presentation made by the Senior Advisor to President Yoweri Museveni on Women and Gender and Executive Secretary of the Pan-African Women Organization (PAWO), Madame Grace Kabayo.

Council recalled its previous decisions and pronouncements on women and children in conflict situations, particularly Press Statement PSC/PR/BR. (DCCVI), adopted at its 706th meeting held on 26 July 2017 and Press Statement PSC/PR/BR. (DXVII) adopted at its 597th meeting held on 10 May 2016.

Council noted with deep concern the continuing violence against women and children in conflict and crisis situations, as well as in post-conflict settings.

Council also noted with concern the low levels of participation of women in various official roles in formal peace processes and political settlements, as well as weak support to women's and children's economic recovery and empowerment in post-conflict settings. In this regard, Council urged AU Member States to redouble their efforts to ensure that their national laws are in line with the provisions of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1325 and 1612, relevant AU instruments and other international instruments for the protection of the human rights of women and children.

Council urged AU Member States to further strengthen their national legal and policy frameworks, including by signing, ratifying and domesticating all relevant regional and international treaties relating to women and children. Council further urged Member States to develop their own sufficiently resourced national action plans to better prevent and respond to the needs of women and children, particularly in violent conflict settings. In this context, Council congratulated all those Member States, which have already developed their national action plans in conformity with UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1612, and called on those which have not yet done so, to also urgently develop their own national action plans.

Council stressed the need for Member States to further strengthen their national justice systems in order to effectively fight impunity and promote justice for the victims of gender based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse against women and girls. In this context, Council

urged Member States to adopt a Zero Tolerance Policy on sexual violence against women and girls.

Council emphasized the need to ensure that the protection of the rights of women and children are systematically addressed throughout the planning, design and mandate implementation stages of AU peace support operations (PSOs). Council further emphasized the importance of ensuring that the protection of the rights and wellbeing of women and children are mainstreamed into the work of relevant components of all AU peacekeeping policies, strategies, training and briefing programs.

Council emphasized the importance of both pre-deployment and in-mission training on the prevention and combating of gender-based violence, as well as sexual exploitation and abuses against women and girls, for personnel deployed in AU-led PSOs. In this regard, Council requested the Commission to expedite the finalization of the Draft AU Policy on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuses in AU PSOs and the Draft Conduct and Discipline Policy for AU PSOs.

Council underscored the importance of meaningful representation and participation of women and children, particularly those directly affected by conflicts and violent extremism, in conflict prevention, peace-making and peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction processes, with a view to ensuring that their needs and voices are adequately taken into consideration. In this context, Council, reiterated its request for the AU Commission, through the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, working in collaboration with the Women and Gender Directorate, to provide mediation capacity building for women, with a view to enhancing women's participation in mediation efforts. In this respect, Council underlined that the FEMWISE Network should offer the relevant platform in this endeavor. Council further requested the Commission to deploy gender and child rights experts in all AU PSOs and post-conflict reconstruction missions.

Council also reiterated its request for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to establish a child protection architecture which will be mandated to mainstream the rights and welfare of children in conflict situations into the strategic and operational decision-making processes of the AU. The architecture will also provide necessary leadership on policy, training, monitoring, reporting and advocacy on all issues relating to the AU child protection agenda.

In order to enhance the visibility of Council's efforts in promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of women and children, participants urged Council to consider holding some of its future sessions on the plight of women and children in conflict and crisis situations in some of the Member States that are actually in conflict /crisis situations. Furthermore, participants encouraged Council to invite representatives of women and children from countries in violent conflict situations to address the Council in its future similar sessions.

Council, once again, reiterated its request for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to expedite the appointment of an AU Special Envoy on Children and Armed Conflicts, preferably a child, in order to more effectively champion the AU's efforts aimed at promoting the rights and welfare of children affected by violent conflicts in the continent.

Council underscored the importance of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of all decisions adopted by Council on women and children in conflict situations. In this regard, Council requested the AU Commission to prepare evaluation reports on the implementation of its previous decisions on women and children in armed conflicts to enable Council to determine further steps to address any challenges. Council agreed that the next open session on women and children in violent conflict situations will be devoted to consideration of the report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the status of implementation of its previous decisions on the plight of women and children in violent conflict situations.

Council recommended the convening of an extraordinary AU Summit dedicated to the plight of women and children in armed conflicts, in order to give it the highest level of political attention that it deserves, with a view to facilitating the effective mobilization of resources required to prevent and respond to the challenges women and children face in situations of violent conflict.

Council agreed to remain actively seized of the matter.