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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
793RD MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
4 SEPTEMBER 2018

PSC/PR/BR.(DCCXCIII)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), dedicated its 793rd meeting held on 4 September 2018, an open session to commemorate the Africa Amnesty Month for the Surrender and Collection of Illegally Owned Weapons Pursuant to Assembly Decision Assembly/AU/Dec. 645 (XXIX) adopted by the 29th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union.

Council and participants took note of the opening statement by H.E. Ambassador Arcanjo Maria do Nascimento in his capacity as the PSC Chairperson for the month of September 2018. They also took note of the statement of H.E. Ambassador Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security read on his behalf by the Acting Secretary for Peace and Security Council, Mr. Amadou Diongue. They further took note of the presentation made by Ms. Einas Mohammed, Acting Head of Defence and Security Division of the AU Commission, as well as statements made by the representatives of AU Member States and those made by the representatives of AU partners and international organizations.

Council and participants recalled Assembly decision Assembly/AU/Dec. 645(XXIX) on the Inaugural Report of the PSC on the Implementation of the AU Master Roadmap on Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020, in which the Assembly declared the month of September each year, up to 2020, as “Africa Amnesty Month” for the surrender and collection of illegally owned weapons/arms, in line with the African and international best practices. They also recalled Assembly decision Assembly/AU/Dec.630 (XXVIII) by which the Assembly endorsed the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020, as well as the Press Statement of the PSC, PSC/PR/BR.(DCCXVI) adopted at its 716th meeting held on 4 September 2017.

Council and participants noted with serious concern the weakly regulated global arms trade and widespread diversion of conventional arms to the illicit market in Africa. In this regard, they emphasized the importance of the international legally binding instruments, including the Arms Trade Treaty, as well as the need to strengthen national legislations and institutions, such as stockpile management, brokering controls, arms marking and record keeping and border security, as important steps in ensuring that weapons do not fall into the wrong hands. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of taking effective steps to recover all illegally owned arms, with a view to address the threat they pose to peace, security and stability in the continent.

Council and participants highlighted the need to strengthen the criminal justice response and capacitate law enforcement agencies to enable them effectively contribute to preventing inflow of illicit weapons into Africa, and at the same time curb the circulation of illicit weapons within the continent. Council and Participants emphasized the need for Member States to further strengthening national border control measures, in close cooperation with the existing international and regional mechanisms, in order to stem the cross border flow of illegal weapons in the Continent. In this regard, Council reiterated its decision to name and shame suppliers and recipients of illicit weapons in Africa.

Council and participants underscored that the observation of the African Amnesty Month significantly contribute to the goal of Silencing the guns and build peaceful societies across the continent. They encouraged AU Member States to observe the African Amnesty Month, not only at the higher levels of government, but to also ensure that the message is disseminated to the wider civil society stakeholders and the media across the continent.

Council and participants encouraged AU Member States to undertake all initiatives pursuant to the Africa Amnesty Month in compliance with the provisions of the relevant legally and politically binding instruments, as well as international best practices. They encouraged AU Member States to make use of the Working Paper produced by the Commission which provides preliminary guidance on designing and implementing activities to encourage the voluntary surrender of weapons, Pending adoption by the relevant AU bodies of Guidelines in this regard.

Council and participants further encourage Member States to remain committed and to grant to persons who surrender illegally-owned weapons, in response to this amnesty month, the protection envisaged with a view to encouraging others to freely and confidently come forward without fear of prosecution or condemnation. They further stressed that all related activities must be conducted in compliance with international human rights law and in a manner that preserves the safety and security of the populations, as well as the state actors involved.

Council and participants commended the AU Commission for providing support to AU Member States on designing and executing related initiatives, including community sensitization, capacity building to law enforcement agencies, and media campaigns, and encouraged other Member States to engage the AU Commission to benefit from the support and expertise available in the observance of the Africa Amnesty Month.

Council and participants welcomed the initiative undertaken by the AU Commission to develop technical and operational guidelines aimed at informing national and regional efforts aimed at observing the Africa Amnesty Month. They also welcomed the initiative to produce a compendium of African experiences and good practices in implementing voluntary disarmament programs. In this regard, Council requested the AU Commission to speedily finalize these products and avail them to all AU Member States to guide their implementation efforts.

Council and participants emphasized that the AU Commission should, each year, remind all AU Member States to observe the Africa Amnesty Month, early in advance, in order to ensure timely preparations for the Amnesty Month in the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap to silence the guns in Africa.

Council welcomed the initiatives undertaken by the AU Commission and the Government of Ethiopia to celebrate the Africa Amnesty Month this year in the field, together with the civil society, institutions/organizations, the media, as well as partners, to further popularize the month, and encouraged all AU Member States to fully participate in this event. In this context, they agreed that the next year Africa Amnesty Month by the PSC should be celebrated on a rotational basis at the regional level, with the full participation of local civil society and

institutions/organizations, with a view of publicizing the month and bringing the initiative closer to those concerned.

Council and participants reiterated its appeal to Member States and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolutions (RECs/RMs) to submit reports to Council, through the AU Commission, and in line with the provisions of the Assembly decision, on the actions taken in implementing the Africa Amnesty Month, to feed in its report to the Assembly in January 2019 on the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap.

Council and participants commended all bilateral and multilateral partners for their continued support to disarmament and arms control programs across the continent and appealed to them to continue doing so. They also commended the efforts of the RECs/RMs, regional bodies with a small arms mandate, and the relevant think tanks and research institutions, which are assisting Member States to effectively address the scourge of illicit proliferation and trade in small arms and light weapons.

Council and participants commended all Member States which have ratified and are implementing the relevant global, continental and regional instruments relating to combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, particularly the Arms Trade Treaty, which, if universally and effectively adhered to, will significantly contribute towards the realization of the goal of silencing the guns in Africa by the year 2020, and will enhance global security and stability. In this context, they urged all Member States, which have not yet done so, to speedily accede to the Treaty.

Council and participants stressed the continued relevance of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects as an overarching and comprehensive global instrument, and urged Member States to fully implement its provisions.

Council agreed to remain actively seized of the matter.