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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
1290TH MEETING

22 JULY 2025
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PSC/PR/CN.1290 (2025)

CONCEPT NOTE

OPEN SESSION ON REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN FORMERLY ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED CONFLICT

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The Executive Council Decision [EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI)][1] adopted during the 21st Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa from 9 to 13 July 2012, requested the Peace and Security Council and the Regional Economic Communities (RECS) to take into account the rights of children in their agenda and to work in close collaboration with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). This collaboration aims to advance a unified continental approach towards protecting children, particularly those affected by armed conflict.

2. In compliance with this decision, the PSC has consistently upheld child protection as a standing item in its engagements, highlighting the centrality of child welfare in the AU's peace and security agenda. The Peace and Security Council's 965th[2] meeting held on 19 November 2020 marked a pivotal moment in reinforcing these commitments, as it reiterated the need for institutionalizing child protection frameworks and promoting accountability for grave violations. Moreover, it underscored the imperative of integrating child protection considerations into peace processes, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and broader humanitarian responses across conflict-affected regions in Africa.

3. However, the African continent continues to face the devastating consequences of armed conflict, which has severely affected the lives of millions, disrupted the fabric of communities, and exposed children to growing levels of violence and exploitation. The growing presence of non-state armed groups, the rise of violent extremism, protracted instability, and persistent conflict-related challenges have significantly increased the risks and incidence of grave violations against children. These include the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, sexual violence, abduction, killing and maiming, denial of humanitarian assistance, and attacks on schools and hospitals, all of which are becoming increasingly widespread.

4. According to the UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict (2024), Africa accounted for 26,555 verified cases of recruitment and use of children between 2019 and 2023, representing more than 40 per cent of such violations globally. These figures highlight not only the scale of the issue but also the urgency of providing comprehensive, sustainable, and rights-based reintegration support to affected children across the continent.

5. Children associated with the Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) in Africa face profound and multifaceted challenges in their transition back to civilian life. These difficulties are deeply embedded in the continent's socio-cultural, economic, and institutional landscapes.

6. Many children are forcibly recruited at a young age and subjected to severe abuse, including coercion into armed violence, exposure to sexual exploitation, and the trauma of witnessing or committing grave violations. These experiences inflict deep psychological and emotional harm, often disrupting their cognitive, social, and developmental well-being. Upon release or escape, most lack access to structured rehabilitation and reintegration services. They face persistent psychological distress, community rejection, and limited access to education, vocational training, or economic opportunities, factors that severely undermine their chances of recovery and long-term reintegration.

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[1] *https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9652-ex_cl_dec_696-725_xxi_e_final.pdf*

[2] *https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/39847-pr-eng-965th-psc-communique-on-the-protection-of-children-in-conflict-situations-in-africa-19-november-2020.pdf*

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7. Reintegration efforts for Children Associated with the Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) are frequently hindered by a range of systemic challenges. These include persistent social stigma, limited state presence in conflict-affected areas, lack of civil documentation, disrupted access to education, and inadequate mental health and psychosocial support services. As a result, many of these children experience exclusion from their communities, are denied access to formal education or vocational pathways, and face a heightened risk of re-recruitment, exploitation, or criminalization. The fragmentation of reintegration programmes, coupled with the absence of sustained follow-up mechanisms, further undermines long-term recovery and contributes to the perpetuation of instability within affected societies.

8. Irrespective of the challenges, the African Union has established a robust normative and policy framework to guide the rehabilitation and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. Key instruments, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the Model Law on Children Affected by Armed Conflict, and the AU Policies on Child Protection in Peace Support Operations and on Mainstreaming Child Protection in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), provide Member States with a comprehensive legal and policy foundation. These frameworks not only promote preventive and responsive child protection measures in conflict and post-conflict contexts but also strengthen accountability for grave violations and support long-term reintegration and recovery efforts.

9. These efforts are complemented by broader frameworks, including Agenda 2063, the Silencing the Guns initiative, Africa's Agenda for Children: Agenda 2040 (with specific reference to Aspiration 9 on children in conflict), the Maputo Protocol (Article 11), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Ten-Year Action Plan on the Eradication of Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in Africa (2020–2030). Collectively, these instruments reflect the continent's commitment to the protection, recovery, and empowerment of children affected by armed violence.

10. Regardless of these advancements, the progress of rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with the armed forces and armed groups remains inconsistent, underfunded, and fragmented. Many Member States continue to face capacity constraints, and reintegration efforts are often limited in scope, duration, and connection to broader peacebuilding or development initiatives. Children are left vulnerable to ongoing harm and excluded from recovery and resilience efforts.

11. The upcoming PSC Open Session thus comes at a critical juncture. It provides a timely opportunity to reaffirm political will, enhance coordination across AU institutions and Member States, and mobilize sustained investment in comprehensive reintegration responses. Ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of CAAFAG is not only a legal and moral imperative but a strategic necessity for building inclusive, peaceful, and resilient societies across the African continent.

II. AIMS OF THE OPEN SESSION

12. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union will convene this open session to deliberate on the pressing issue of the rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups across the continent. Building on existing efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict, the session will serve as a strategic platform to reflect on the progress made, identify persistent challenges, and explore innovative and sustainable reintegration approaches that are child-centered, context-specific, and community-driven.

13. The session will bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including AU Member States, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), the Africa

Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP-CAAC), Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms, United Nations entities, civil society organizations, international partners and children. This inclusive dialogue will foster shared learning, enhance coordination, and reinforce the collective commitment to addressing the long-term needs of children affected by armed conflict.

14. In particular, the Open Session will aim to

a) Receive updates on the situation of children associated with armed groups and armed forces, including reintegration trends, challenges, and lessons learned;

b) Strengthen political commitment and coordinated action to implement reintegration and post-conflict recovery frameworks;

c) Encourage Member States to integrate child protection and reintegration into national DDR and peacebuilding strategies, with adequate resourcing for long-term, holistic support to affected children and communities;

d) Promote the exchange of best practices, particularly inclusive, community-based, and gender-responsive reintegration models; and

e) Reaffirm Member States' obligations under continental and international frameworks and advance practical recommendations to enhance accountability and service delivery.

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

15. The upcoming Open Session is expected to serve as a strategic platform to raise awareness of the urgent need to address the rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups. It will underscore the severe and lasting consequences of recruitment and re-recruitment on children's development and well-being while emphasizing the critical role of long-term reintegration in promoting sustainable peace, resilience, and community recovery in post-conflict settings.

16. The session is further expected to generate concrete recommendations to strengthen the collective response of the African Union, its Member States, RECs/RMs, and partners. This includes reaffirming political commitments, enhancing the implementation of continental and international frameworks, promoting gender-responsive and community-based reintegration models, and improving coordination and accountability mechanisms.

17. At the end of the session, the Council is expected to adopt a communique summarizing the key points and decisions agreed upon to address this critical issue.

IV. FORMAT AND PARTICIPATION

18. The Open Session will be chaired by H.E. Ambassador Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Ambassador of the Republic of Uganda to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union, as Chairperson of the Peace and Security Council for July 2025. H.E. Ambassador Rebecca also currently serves as the Co-Chair of the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP-CAAC).

19. The session will be held in an open format, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders engaged in the protection and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. Participants will

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include AU Member States, representatives of the ACERWC, AP-CAAC, RECs/RMs, United Nations agencies, international organizations, civil society organizations, and members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the African Union.

20. Key speakers are expected to include the following:

a) The Chairperson of the PSC;

b) The AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security;

c) Representative of the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts;

d) The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;

e) Formerly Associated Individuals;

f) United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and

g) Save the Children.

21. Notably, due to time, and except for Member States and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), the rest of the invitees will be requested to submit their written statements to the PSC Secretariat through the email address: PSC-Secretariat@africanunion.org copied to SituationRoom@africanunion.org, Ms. Neema Chusi on chusin@africanunion.org and Dr. Isabela Warioba on wariobai@africanunion.org

V. DATE AND VENUE

22. The open session will be held in-person (Physically) in the Plenary Hall of the Old AU Conference Centre, on Tuesday, 22 July 2025, starting at 10 a.m., Addis Ababa local time. It will be conducted in two of the AU official languages of the AU: English and French.