



## CONCEPT NOTE

### LAUNCH OF YOUTH SILENCING THE GUNS CAMPAIGN: ADVANCING YOUTH ROLES AND CAPACITIES TO SILENCE THE GUNS IN AFRICA

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Since independence, several Member States of the African Union (AU) have experienced diverse threats to peace and human security resulting in enormous deaths, injuries, displacement, the destruction of properties and livelihoods as well as the reversal of socio-economic and developmental gains. In order to alleviate human suffering, in May 2013, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) adopted a Solemn Declaration with the “determination to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa, to make peace a reality for all people and to end wars in the Continent. They pledged not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans and undertake to end all wars in Africa by 2020”, a commitment that is referred to as Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020. To facilitate the attainment of the aforementioned commitments, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) developed, in 2016, the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (AUMR), which is composed of five aspects namely, political, economic, social, environmental and legal aspects.

Since the adoption of the AUMR, several initiatives have been undertaken to fast-track the actualization of the agenda including the adoption of the AU Theme of the Year for 2020, as ‘Silencing the Guns: creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development’, with the aim of contributing to ongoing efforts to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa and provide an opportunity to streamline collective efforts into country-level strategies. In advancement of the agenda, AU acknowledges the important roles of youth as evident in key decisions of the PSC, such as its Press Statement [PSC/PR/BR. (DCCCXXIV)] adopted at its 824<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 5 February 2019, which was dedicated to open session on Silencing the Guns. Council encouraged inclusive approaches to promoting peace by all stakeholders, especially youth and women.

Recognizing that over 70% of the African population is below the age of 35, the AUC prioritizes mainstreaming of youth in all thematic areas of Agenda 2063 through their participation and creating opportunities for their development. Key decisions on Youth, Peace and Security are derived from Article 17 of the Africa Youth Charter, adopted by the Assembly in 2006; the dedication of the AU 2017 theme of year as “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth”; 807<sup>th</sup> communiqué of the PSC on “Youth, Peace and Security” held on 8 November 2018, as well as the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) with focus on five pillars of participation, prevention, protection, partnership, disengagement and reintegration and resolution 2419 (2018). These normative frameworks acknowledge the important roles of youth and call for their meaningful participation in all spectrums of peace and security.

## **II. RATIONALE**

Although, diverse stakeholders instigate and sustain violence, the youth are often categorized either as perpetrators or victims without adequate recognition of their significant contributions as agents of peace. The youth are increasingly perceived as perpetrators of violence, problems to be solved rather than solutions to the problems given the relative exploitation of their vulnerabilities by political actors, militia groups, violent extremists and or organizers of protests against incumbent governments to voice societal dissatisfaction. However, they are equally affected by armed conflicts and its aftermath with this demographic group being the primary targets for human trafficking networks, sexual exploitation amongst other adverse consequences. Diverse theories exist over the factors responsible for youth involvement in conflicts such as: demographics (a large, growing and unemployed young population increases the likelihood of their participation); coercion (through abduction, manipulation or loss of hopeful alternatives); and the “youth crisis,” which touches on the underlying structural (in) stability in key socio-economic areas such as education and employment.

Across the five regions of Africa, despite daunting challenges confronting their interventions, youth are immensely contributing to peace and security in the full cycle of conflicts, namely, prevention, management and resolution as well as post conflict reconstruction and development. In recognition of the roles that youth play as leaders, partners and beneficiaries in the promotion of sustainable peace and security, the AUC’s Peace and Security Department (PSD) launched the Youth for Peace Africa Program in September 2018 with the cardinal objective of facilitating meaningful participation of youth in all spectrums of peace and security in the Continent. In tandem with the 807<sup>th</sup> communiqué of the PSC adopted on 5 November 2018, the Commission, in collaboration with the RECs/RMs appointed five (5) regional Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP); conducted a continental study to assess the diverse roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa; and developed a Continental Framework

on Youth, Peace and Security, anchored on Articles 11 and 17 of the AYC and UNSCR 2250, with the objective of guiding youth, Member States, RECs/RMs, AUC and its relevant agencies, as well as partners in advancing the youth, peace and security agenda in Africa.

In line with the aforementioned institutional policies and the continental framework on youth, peace and security, the PSD through the Youth for Peace Africa Program and the STG unit continues to promote the meaningful participation of youth in the implementation of the STG agenda. Notably, in July 2019, the STG unit, in collaboration with the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations of the UN (DPPA-DPO), organized a side event on the role of the youth in silencing the guns, on the margins of the Africa Regional High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism conducive to Terrorism which took place on 10 July 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya. In March 2020, the PSC planned a two-day technical meeting with youth and women to identify measures to enhance their roles in advancing the STG agenda, which was however postponed due to the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on the continent. In furtherance to the PSC's intention and the YPS Continental Framework, the PSD in collaboration with the Office of the Youth Envoy, relevant departments in the AUC, RECs/RMS and the African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAPs) is launching a Youth Silencing the Guns Campaign aimed at advancing youth roles and capacities towards silencing the guns in Africa. The campaign shall comprise of series of virtual engagements with youth to mobilize and enhance their contributions towards furthering the STG aspiration.

### **III. AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of the youth silencing the guns campaign is to provide a platform to mobilize the development and support of key actions that can be undertaken by youth to fast track the implementation of the STG Agenda in Africa. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Identify the roles and key activities that the youth can play to advance the STG agenda;
- Foster intergenerational co-leadership on silencing the guns and promotion of governance, peace, security and development;
- Identify the challenges and gaps that hinder the effective participation and contributions of the youth to silencing the guns;
- Provide policy and action-oriented recommendations to address the identified challenges and barriers to youth's participation, as well as maximise opportunities and enhance their contributions.

#### IV. EXPECTED OUTCOME

- Declaration on key actions to be undertaken by youth, which will feed into the deliberations of the Extraordinary Session of Heads of State and Government on the theme of the year;
- Recommendations to policy makers to advance the participation and contributions of youth in Silencing the Guns;
- Support for youth-led projects and activities that contributes to advancing the silencing the guns agenda.

#### V. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE CAMPAIGN:

Within the framework of the Youth Silencing the Guns Campaign, the AUC in collaboration with the RECs/RMs and African Youth Ambassadors for Peace shall organizes series of virtual activities as follows:

**The Peace and Security Department:** The official launch of the youth silencing the guns campaign; convening of regional consultations with youth in the 5 AU geographic regions; side-event on the roles of youth in silencing the guns on the margins of the extraordinary summit of the Assembly of the Union; provision of financial and technical support for the implementation of youth-led projects; bi-monthly social media sensitization engagements with youth on AUMR as well as the commemoration of the International Peace Day and Africa Youth Day.

**The AU Office of Youth Envoy (OYE) in collaboration with the relevant departments also** Intends to convene intergenerational dialogues (IGDs) to foster co-leadership on silencing the guns; support for the conduct of the five regional consultations, launch of social media campaigns to mobilize youth on the STG agenda; provision of seed funding/grants to youth projects on STG; and amplifying young peacebuilders initiatives.

**The Youth Division of the Human Resource Science and Technology Department** is responsible for the coordination of youth mainstreaming and engagement across the Commission, and provides the framework and platforms to engage young people. For the 2020 theme of the year, the Youth Division will continue to play this role, and will mobilize and engage youth through this interdepartmental collaboration, in addition to its existing youth engagement activities, including the 1 Million by 2021 initiative, which supports structural conflict prevention efforts in implementation of the STG agenda.

**African Governance Architecture (AGA) Secretariat:** On behalf of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Platform, the AGA Secretariat conducts yearly activities tagged to the theme of the year. This year, as part of its contribution to theme of the year the AGA will organize two major activities on youth and the theme of the year. The Regional/continental Youth consultation will be convened this year under the auspices of the AGA Youth Engagement

Strategy (YES). The main focus of the consultations is to provide a safe space for young people to contribute to the discussion on the theme of the year more specifically geared towards structural prevention of conflict. Deliberations will cascade through policy discussion on the theme of the year by AU Policy Organs and AGA Platform Members – 9<sup>th</sup> High Level Dialogue. The Consultation also aims to harness young people’s insights, capacities and creatively to hack solutions to issues of peace and security in the continent. Secondly, AGA has launched a youth innovation challenge on democracy and governance. This challenge was launched as a means to practically engage young innovators to hack solutions for in contribution to structural prevention of conflict. Winners of this innovation challenge will be featured on the AGA youth consultations and provided awards. Through these two interventions we intend to highlight young people’s contributions to the theme of the year. The outcomes of these activities will feed into 9<sup>th</sup> High Level Dialogue.

#### **INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES AND DATES:**

- Official launch of the Youth Silencing the Guns campaign – 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020 at 15:00 East Africa Time;
- Five regional consultations on the roles of youth on silencing the guns – 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020;
- Bi-monthly social media sensitization engagements with youth on AUMR at national, regional or continental levels;
- Social media mobilization #YouthSilencingTheGuns emoji in partnership with Twitter on World Population Day – 11 July 2020
- Youth Silencing the Guns Awards Call launch and selection – August 2020
- Commemoration of International Day of Peace – 21 September 2020;
- Youth Innovation challenge on democracy and governance – Currently ongoing;
- AGA youth consultations on the theme of the year – Oct 2020
- PSC session on YPS in commemoration of Africa Youth Month – November 2020;
- Side-event on the margins of the extraordinary summit of the Assembly in December 2020

#### **VI. PARTICIPATION AND METHODOLOGY**

The launch of the campaign and regional consultations shall adopt a participatory approach including presentations, workshops and plenary discussions on the major contributions of youth across major thematic areas including democracy and governance, peace, security, displacement, gender, development, migration, climate change, poverty, unemployment etc.