

AFRICAN UNION



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**13TH HIGH-LEVEL RETREAT ON THE PROMOTION OF PEACE,
SECURITY AND STABILITY IN AFRICA**

*“Transformative Mediation for Africa’s Effective Governance and Peace
Dividends”*

22 – 23 October, 2022

Windhoek, Namibia

CONCEPT NOTE

A. Introduction

Pursuant to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, particularly, Article 3 (f), on the promotion of “peace, security, and stability on the Continent”, the African Union Commission (AUC) has undertaken various strategic initiatives to support member states in their efforts to prevent and resolve violent conflict. Over the past 12 years, this has included convening the High-Level Retreat on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability, which has become a prominent forum for Special Envoys, High Representatives and Special Representatives of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCCs), and other mediators working in Africa. The Retreat offers a platform for the aforementioned actors and mediation experts to share experiences and best practices; with a view to continuously improve interventions in conflict prevention, management and resolution, on the continent.

Over the years, the Retreat has strategically engaged with timely, contextual and challenging issues, with a particular emphasis on strengthening mediation and dialogue capacities on the continent, and promoting collaboration and complementarity among the various actors. Pursuant to this, and considering the African Union’s continued role leading and/or supporting various mediation, dialogue and other peace processes across the continent, this year’s Retreat will take stock of the AU’s progress in peacemaking, and reflect on how to enhance its role to yield better, broader peace dividends for more sustainable peace and better governance in Africa.

B. Context

Mediation and facilitated dialogue are powerful conflict resolution tool, largely rooted in African culture and traditions, with a long history of success not only in the AU, dating back to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), but also in regional bodies, including Regional Economic Communities, Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), and AU member states in their efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts on the continent. In order to effectively conduct or support peaceful conflict resolution processes, mediation remains a science and an art that requires mediators to have a good grasp of history, culture, and politics, amongst others. As a professional field, the provision of technical support to help mediators identify and engage key stakeholders, facilitate shuttle diplomacy and undertake conflict analysis and mediation process design remain critical to bringing parties to the table, incentivizing them to reach agreement, as well as supporting and monitoring their implementation of peace agreements is critical to successful mediation.

As has been recently witnessed in countries like Comoros, Chad, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic, Member States there are renewed efforts to use national dialogue as a conflict resolution and prevention tool. In 2022 this is particularly important as the nature of conflict and its root causes continue to change and evolve, with mediation, and more increasingly dialogue needed across the entire conflict spectrum. Relatedly, whether as a preventive measure to address latent, emerging or manifesting conflicts, or supporting conflict management and resolution through negotiations for the cessation of hostilities and ensuring humanitarian access, or as part of accompanying and supporting complex political transitions, and consolidating peace in the post-conflict stages, the role of mediation cannot be overstated.

With the AU currently supporting various Member States across all five regions, and most notably in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Central African region, it is critical for AU mediators to reflect and exchange on the state of play, the progress made, challenges faced and best practices that can be replicated and enhanced for positive and peaceful outcomes. Further, a reflection on how AU mediators continue to support Member States in implementing peace agreements, convening inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation processes, and strengthening social cohesion, will be underscored with the aim of synthesizing recommendations on how the effectiveness and efficiency of these efforts can be better enhanced.

Underpinning all considerations on the role of mediation and dialogue in addressing conflict should be the question of inclusivity, particularly ensuring the meaningful participation of youth and women in peace processes. Guided by empirical evidence that more inclusive peace processes are more effective and sustainable, as a norm-setting institution, the AU has taken unprecedented steps in ensuring the inclusion of women, and more recently youth considerations in Track 1 and Track 2 mediation processes throughout the continent, most recently through the establishment of the WiseYouth Network. The engagement of structures like FemWise-Africa and now WiseYouth is urgent and critical towards ensuring more inclusive AU-led and supported mediation processes as both these Networks offer a pool of standby capacities based in Member States, and available and able to support mediation and dialogue efforts.

Essential to sustainable conflict prevention, national reconciliation and peacebuilding, the Retreat will therefore reflect on practical ways in which the aforementioned Networks can be strengthened, supported and utilized, alongside existing regional mediation capacities, which includes the revitalization of the Pan African Network of the Wise (PANWISE), a body primarily comprised of Regional structures similar to the AU's Panel of the Wise.

C. Rationale

It is based on the foregoing that the 13th High-Level Retreat will seek to bring together high-level mediators, mediation experts and practitioners, particularly within the AU and RECs/RMs, to reflect on ongoing AU-led or supported mediation and dialogue processes, towards identifying practical recommendations to enhance these efforts and achieve sustainable peace and development through fairer, meaningful peace dividends.

In doing so, the Retreat will reflect deeply on the various mediation and dialogue processes that the AU is currently leading or supporting with a focus on identifying successes, lessons learned, as well as opportunities for improvement in order to strengthen and consolidate its efforts for more amplified outcomes. It will also reflect on how AU mediators can collaborate, coordinate, and complement efforts of national, regional and international actors working within the same space to reduce duplication and competition, while enhancing efficiency and effectiveness by leveraging comparative advantages, and complementarity. The Retreat will also allow AU mediators and support actors to concretely reflect on promoting and enhancing inclusivity, mainly through mainstreaming the meaningful participation of African youth and women in mediation and other peace processes.

Finally, the Retreat will provide a platform to document knowledge and experiences from mediators who have led or supported mediation, dialogue, and national reconciliation processes, towards enhancing the AU's knowledge management on the same. It is

expected that the outcomes of the Retreat will further inform emerging policy, practice, and discourse as the AU, RECs/RMs, Member States, and others seek to enhance the role of mediation and dialogue for peaceful outcomes as a critical means of furthering the overarching goals of a peaceful and prosperous continent as outlined in the AU's Roadmap towards Silencing the Guns by 2030, and Agenda 2063.

D. Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The 13th High-Level Retreat has the following specific objectives, to:

1. Provide an opportunity for deep reflection on current AU-led or supported mediation and other peace processes, including support to the implementation of peace agreements, towards taking stock of key achievements, lessons learned and best practices;
2. Reflect on how to better coordinate and harmonize ongoing efforts towards enhancing complementarity and better coordination with national, regional and international actors for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness;
3. Strategize on the meaningful inclusion of African women and youth in mediation and other peace processes, culminating in the official launch of the WiseYouth Network;
4. Contribute to the mediation-related knowledge management capacities of the AU through documenting AU experiences in mediation and dialogue, towards informing and strengthening current and future interventions;
5. Assess institutional approaches and operational needs in order to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of AU-led mediation and dialogue processes.

E. Format

The purpose of a retreat is to share ideas in an open and frank manner. Therefore, the Retreat will primarily be an interactive, informal gathering that reflects on enhancing the AU's role in ongoing mediation and other peace processes in Africa. The format of the discussions at the Retreat will allow for an exchange of views between AU decisionmakers, mediators and other relevant actors. In consideration of the current Covid-19 pandemic and monkeypox public health emergency, the High-Level Retreat will respect all necessary protocols for in-person participation. The outcomes of the Retreat will be captured in a report, as well as a knowledge product that will be published as part of the AU Mediation and Dialogue Division's knowledge management efforts.

G. Timeframe & Location

The Retreat is co-organized by the AUC Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, in conjunction with the Government of the Republic of Namibia. It will take place from 22-23 October 2022, in Windhoek, Namibia.

H. Participants

The Retreat will bring together the Chairperson of the Commission, members of the Peace and Security Council, Senior Representatives of the AU Commission, and the RECs/RMs. In addition, the AUC will invite senior officials and Special Envoys of the United Nations, and other bilateral partners and non-governmental organizations to participate in the programme.