

AFRICAN UNION

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REMARKS BY SPECIAL ENVOY ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY OF
THE AFRICAN UNION CHAIRPERSON ON THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN
CHILD

President of the Gambella Regional State;

President of the Gambella Child Parliament;

*HE Zenebu Tadesse, Minister of Women and Children of the Federal Government
of Ethiopia;*

Representatives of UN Agencies;

Representatives of INGOS

Distinguished guests

Let me first bring to you the warm greetings of H.E. Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. She congratulates the Chairperson of the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child for organizing this commemoration of the Day of the African Child in Gambella – and in places where children are more in need of our attention. She also salutes the leadership of the Ethiopian government, in particular the president of the Gambella regional state, for hosting this 2016 edition of the Day of the African Child.

As the AUC Chairperson's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security I am myself honored and very grateful for the warm welcome which I received yesterday from the entire government upon my arrival in this beautiful and green city. I am also honored to address this important gathering as the theme of the year, the protection of children's rights in conflict and crises is part of my mandate – and one that is particularly close to my heart – as we cannot dissociate children from their mothers. And as we know, African women have the primary protection role in families and society.

I will like to acknowledge the partnership displayed by the AUC departments of Social Affairs, Peace and Security and Political Affairs – and other partners in support to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in organizing this historic commemoration of the African Child in Gambella.

Wars and conflicts put children in situations where their rights are violated, including: the right to life; the right to live in a family environment; the right to health; and the right to survival and development. And we are all concerned by the negative impact caused by conflicts and crises in Africa. In 2013, the United

Nations Secretary General identified six grave violations of children's rights in times of armed conflict. These are as follows: recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming of children; sexual violence against children; attacks against schools or hospitals; abduction of children; denial of humanitarian access – to name a few. And there are new trends resulting in new challenges such as violent extremism.

As we are all aware, the African Continent remains the most conflict prone region in the world. The main cause of conflicts and crises in the continent is the blatant violation of human rights. The African Union (AU) has since its inception committed itself to promote peace, security and stability of the continent, to promote democracy and good governance, due process, the rule of law and human rights, as well to engage in effective intervention under grave circumstances. The AU, through Peace and Security Council (PSC), proactively assesses potential crisis situations and commission's fact-finding missions to troublesome regions; thereafter make recommendations to the AU for appropriate interventions.

As a continent, 25 years ago, we adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), a conscious and bold step forward in affirming children's rights as human rights. In too many places across the continent however, the African Child is particularly vulnerable due to situations of conflict and disasters. The African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child goes beyond the protection of children during armed conflicts (and situations of internal armed conflict, tension and strife) by according protection to refugee children.

Violations of child's rights have marked conflict and crisis in Africa for too long. What I witness during my field missions across a range of situations is quite troublesome. Children, and particularly the girl child, are under threat in schools –

which should be safe spaces. They are forced into sexual slavery and suicide missions by groups such as Boko Haram. In other situations, young children are forcibly recruited or radicalized to join armed groups. Some children are forced to remain in protracted displacement situations, where access to basic services, including education, are stretched or non-existent. As a member of the Commission of Inquiry set up by the African Union to investigate human rights abuses in the conflict in South Sudan, I visited IDP and refugee camps in Juba, Bentiu, Malakal, Bor, Leer and other places who had sought refuge in UN compounds for protection, but were subject to gender and sexual based violence, even in these supposedly safe zones. In Eastern Congo, I spoke to young boys who were also raped in the ongoing violence and insecurity. In some peacekeeping contexts, such as Central African Republic, those that are meant to protect have turned into predators, abusing and exploiting children.

I am very happy to see here today the Gambella Child Parliament. It is vital that we not only prevent violence against children, but also ensure their meaningful participation in the issues that affect them. We do not only then see their victimization under difficult contexts, but also their agency in bringing about positive change in their lives and their communities. As such, we have to recommit to protecting the broad spectrum of children's rights. Member States have to demonstrate resolve in delivering on their commitments, and we have to ensure monitoring and accountability in that regard.

The commemoration of the Day of the African Child 2016 today will provide one of Africa's best practices in the elimination of conflicts and crisis situations across the continent. This includes raising the visibility of the Charter and the Day of the African Child, experience sharing and an inter-generational dialogue to discuss

ways of addressing conflict prevention, management and resolution and how best to protect the rights of children during conflict and crises.

In conclusion, if we are to achieve Agenda 2063's flagship program on silencing the guns by 2020 and achieving a peaceful and prosperous Africa, we must ensure the fulfillment of the rights of all children. Protection of children and promotion of their rights is not an optional but a central tenet for peace, stability and development.

I thank you.