

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Leveraging Arts for Peace – Training on Silencing the Guns

As a follow-up to the December 2021 Seminar for African Artists on Silencing the Guns, the African Union (AU) Commission in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), convened a five-day virtual training for another cohort of artists from 18 to 22 September 2023, under the theme: 'Leveraging Arts for Peace'. The training was grounded in the belief that Art helps prevent conflict in communities by raising awareness and inspiring tolerance around societal differences.

Held during the Africa Amnesty Month, the training, organised by the AU Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), through the Silencing the Guns (STG) Unit, brought together 25 African artists from all the regions of Africa, to not only raise their consciousness about promoting peaceful co-existence in communities, but also to sensitize them against the use of the art to incite violence, promote hate speech, hate crimes or other forms of conflict.

In his opening remarks at the start of the training, the AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, underscored the need for artists to champion and advocate for peace with an enhanced understanding of efforts undertaken towards a cohesive society – through conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation. *“As artists, you have the power to not only bring people together, but also inspire a sense of community”*, said Dr. Chambas.

On her part, Ms. Svenja Vollmer, on behalf of Mr. Evariste Karambizi, the Director of the Division for Peace at UNITAR, applauded artists for their unique ability to translate complex emotions, experiences and societal issues into tangible and relatable forms. Ms. Vollmer called upon the artists to use their creative energy to bolster the common goal of silencing the guns in Africa. *“Through music, dance, visual arts, literature, theatre, and more, your guilds have historically challenged injustice, promoted dialogue, and kindled the flames of social change”*, she stated.

During the five-day training, discussions centered around the role of artists in advancing peace advocacy through arts; principles for effective advocacy and outreach; AU's work in advancing peace and security; and the existing approaches and frameworks to silencing the Guns in the continent, among others. Furthermore, the training guided participants with the knowledge and skills to advance peace and security through artistic expression; heighten awareness and promote ownership of the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative to campaign towards supporting country-level interventions to achieve a conflict free Africa and create favourable conditions for the continent's socio-economic transformation.

The artists were also taken through the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa - the guiding document for the Silencing the Guns initiative, which highlights

interventions that need to be taken in the political, economic, social, environmental and legal aspects; as well as an introduction to concepts of conflict and conflict analysis; and the role of artists in advancing peace, among others. In this regard, participants exchanged views and brainstormed on creative ideas that would heighten public awareness on Silencing the Guns and the negative impact of the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons on the continent.

In December 2021, the Silencing the Guns Unit organized a continental seminar on “Art, Culture and Heritage, as Levers to Silence the Guns in Africa”, in Accra, Ghana with the aim of sensitizing African Artists on the importance of promoting a culture of peace.

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