



**Briefing of the AU Chairperson's Special Envoy on
Youth, Ms. Aya Chebbi**

**African Union Peace and Security Council
Open Session on Youth, Peace and Security**

ADDIS ABABA, 12 November 2020

Distinguished Members of the Peace and Security Council

AU Member States

The Diplomatic Corps

African Youth

Allow me to express my appreciation to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Chairperson of the Peace and Security Council, for the month of November, which also marks the celebration of Africa Youth Month.

The decision of the Peace and Security Council to dedicate an annual open session on youth, peace and security is critical but I would like to also appeal to the esteemed council to have a dedicated session on Youth and COVID-19 pandemic due to the current circumstances so we can brief on the particular challenges of the past few months, from the disruption of education to loss of jobs, digital divide, inequality and humanitarian crises.

Despite these hardships, African youth have shown unprecedented leadership and resilience in civic action, community awareness, fighting misinformation and using technology, from Kenya to Nigeria, from Egypt to Cameroon and many other countries. They have also shown commitment to working with the African Union in its efforts to stop the spread of the virus. In this respect, the African Union established the African Youth Front on Coronavirus to support Africa CDC continental response.

COVID-19 has forced us to rethink the notion of security, to rethink the definition of threat, and ask ourselves, what is a threat? is it climate change, is it terrorism, or COVID-19?

My office will release next week a Policy Paper on Africa Youth Agency, Challenges and Recovery Roadmap on COVID-19 to answer some of these questions and for the council consideration to provide the opportunity to present the policy paper and its findings before you

I also express our appreciation for the council's adoption of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) and the 10 year implementation plan which will go a long way in implementing the YPS agenda through the development of national action plans.

Excellencies,

We have no shortage of policies in fact your esteemed council have adopted many progressive policies and charters, you have taken the responsibility and commitment to harness the peace dividend but what we need now is implementation, frameworks need to be translated into action plans, we need to move from aspiration to implementation.

Since the AU summit in early February I positioned the silencing the guns agenda as central to my advocacy and mandate as the chairperson's envoy on youth in line with the vision of H.E. Moussa Faki to have youth voices galvanized.

I sincerely thank H.E Commissioner of Peace and Security for the opportunity to co-lead with you the [Youth Silencing the Guns campaign](#), where we have utilized every platform and every tool available to engage young people creatively

- Through social media, we have reached over 48 million youth in the past 6 months using **#AfricaYouthLead**
- We engaged youth in the creatives and fashion industry in understanding the theme of the year through Outfit Design Challenge as the AU placed African

Fashion Value Chain on top of Policy Agenda and theme of 2021 is on Arts, culture and heritage

- We engaged the young women by creating the first ever [AU feminist blog](#) and [Publication](#) called Sauti صوتي showcasing the stories of peacebuilding and resilience of 25 young women

Your excellencies,

Using innovation and unconventional ways for youth engagement in Silencing the Guns agenda is possible, the more you support our innovative methods, the more we can bring millions of youth to the key frameworks of the AU and the council.

Despite the disruption of COVID-19 outbreak, we have also taken this campaign to the ground;

I have just returned from South Sudan, where I celebrated Africa Youth Day on 1st of November with the youth of the community of Rumbek, in Lakes State. In Rumbek, young people handed in their guns voluntarily with over 1000 guns collected. The approach of voluntary disarmament through dialogue with youth has shown to be more effective than forceful disarmament which usually results in violence and potential re-armament, therefore implementing holistic Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes for youth is critical.

Young people in South Sudan like other conflict settings are asking for capacity-development, resources and support from national authorities beyond ethnic and political boundaries, especially marginalized and vulnerable youth, the displaced,

refugees, migrants, offline youth in rural areas and informal settlements, youth with disability and young women.

I met a youth movement in Juba called *Ana Ta3ban* meaning “I’m tired” because young people are tired, tired of conflict, war and displacement, and they want peace.

African Youth are misunderstood and stereotyped. We should not analyse youth from a market perspective and turn them into numbers, mostly negative numbers, as the unemployed, the job seeker or the radicalized into violent extremism. Stats are great but they have to provide a nuanced narrative.

Young people are not the problem, they are the solution, the drive, force and innovation of this continent.

In fact African youth are saving the continent during this pandemic, young peace builders are saving the continent because without their work in the communities, we would not have reached progress.

These are some of the experiences from the ground but I am sure, my fellow peacebuilders, African Youth Ambassadors for Peace will also share their first hand experiences.

Your excellencies;

I want to use today’s briefing to present the [Policy Report on Youth Silencing the Guns Intergenerational Dialogues](#) which is the result of 6 regional dialogues we convened for North, South, East, West, Central and Diaspora regions.

1800 participated from youth civil society organisations, AUC commissioners and departments, the Regional Economic Communities, international organizations and

partners as well as member states, through honorable ministers, parliamentarians, and ambassadors.

The result of these 6 dialogues which I'm presenting today is the African Youth Declaration on Silencing the Guns with 10 concrete recommendations from young people of Africa and the Diaspora who participated. I'd like to highlight 4 key issues that came out strongly from all regions;

1. Youth Livelihoods

Young people are urging you to silence youth unemployment.

Across all six regions of Africa, participants chose in the survey we conducted, Job Security as their top priority for Silencing the guns even before the choice of free conflict Africa.

With rapid urbanization, the next biggest threat to our continent is mass unemployment. That's why we need to move from youth, Peace and security to Youth Peace and Development agenda.

Urgent action is needed from member states to create the environment and opportunities for jobs with dignity, so we can put an end to youth dying in the mediterranean looking for better livelihoods. Just over the weekend more than 1,600 African migrants were rescued at the sea and hundreds of youth died in the journey.

2. Youth Inclusion and Intergenerational Co-Leadership

We explain in the '[Report on Greater Inclusion of African Youth in Public Service and Governance](#)' the generation gap and pathways to absorb youth into leadership.

We should not allow under our watch, your excellencies, the recruitment of child soldiers and youth by drug lords and warlords when they can be recruited to public service, when there can be quotas for youth to occupy parliamentary seats, when youth can be appointed as special advisors on youth, ministers on youth and other portfolios, when

young people can bring their energy and innovation to public service instead of urban violence.

I urge you to institutionalize intergenerational co-leadership at all levels of governance, because participation only with a seat at the table does not guarantee young people's voices are heard; but with co-leadership in mediation, negotiations, within missions and diplomatic corps, at the summit delegations and at the design and implementation, then youth can find meaningful ways to co-lead with you and contribute to peace.

It is therefore essential for all member states to ratify the African Youth Charter which will facilitate this greater inclusion.

3. Silencing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Young women are urging you to criminalize Gender-Based Violence in all its forms especially in conflict, displacement and humanitarian settings including femicide, rape, harmful practices, child sexual abuse, trafficking, and all other forms of sexual exploitation

Last week, I also visited Namibia and listened to the **#ShutItAllDown** youth movement which has taken to the streets in peaceful protest to demand the end of GBV and are now working closely with the government institutions and highest level of leadership to address the crisis.

4. Protection of young people

The declaration calls for the protection of fundamental youth rights and freedoms and civic space. Protection of young people in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law is one of five priorities of the Continental framework on YPS.

It is in the interest of peace and security on the continent to respond to youth demands with dialogue not use of force.

We must emerge from COVID-19 crisis by building trust between our youth and institutions through open intergenerational dialogues and solidarity.

In fact, it's time for YPS agenda to be elevated to the heads of states with *High Level Continental Intergenerational Dialogue on Youth, Peace and Development* convened between African leaders and young peacebuilders in an open fora.

In conclusion, with this declaration I submit the views, voices and aspirations of young people on the silencing the guns agenda.

What African youth are saying is; there is no silencing the guns without addressing political and socio-economic issues of youth, there is no STG without youth co-leading the solutions not merely seated at the table.

I invite the Peace and Security Council to address the issues and actions outlined in the declaration with the needed urgency because we're running out of time, Time Is Up.

Let this decade be the implementation decade because only with 65% of the population can we beat a global pandemic, only with African youth confidence and trust, we can build peace for the Africa We Want.

I remain committed to work with you in the realization of Agenda 2063.

I thank you