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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
223rd MEETING
30 MARCH 2010
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PSC/PR/COMM.(CCXXIII)

PRESS STATEMENT COMMUNIQUE

PRESS STATEMENT OF THE 223rd MEETING
OF THE PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), at its 223rd meeting, held on 30 March 2010, deliberated on the situation of women and children in armed conflicts and adopted the following Press Statement:

Council took note of the Briefing Note submitted by the Commission on the theme Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts, as well as of the statements made by *Femmes Africa Solidarité* (FAS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Council recalled the Tripoli Declaration on the Elimination of Conflicts in Africa and the Promotion of Sustainable Peace [SP/Assembly/PS/Decl.(I)], adopted by the Special Session of the Assembly of the Union on the Consideration and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa, held in Tripoli, Great Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, on 31 August 2009, in particular paragraph 23 of the Declaration in which the Heads of State and Government decided to proclaim 2010 as the *Year of Peace and Security in Africa*.

Council further recalled decision Assembly/AU/Dec.275(XIV) on the Year of Peace and Security in Africa, adopted by the 14th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Addis Ababa from 31 January to 2nd February 2010, in particular the request made to the Peace and Security Council to devote a special session to the theme of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts. In this respect, Council stressed that women and children are prominent among the victims of armed conflicts.

Council noted that a focus on women and children brings into sharp focus the wider human security dimensions of the AU peace and security agenda, as articulated in the Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defense and Security Policy, adopted by the 2nd Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Sirte, Libya, on 28 February 2004, to the extent that conflict in Africa cannot be delinked from the challenges of reducing poverty and promoting health, development and education, especially in post-conflict situations.

Council emphasized that, over the years, the AU has adopted a comprehensive human rights architecture that provides mechanisms for both preventing and addressing violence against women and children in armed conflicts, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and Declaration 229 (XII), adopted by the 12th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Addis Ababa from 1 to 3 February 2009, which proclaimed 2010 – 2020 as the African Women's Decade, and the African Charter on the Protection and Welfare of the Child, as well as relevant international instruments such as the United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820(2008) on Women, Peace and Security.

Council, at the same time, stressed that gross violations of human rights, including sexual violence, forced displacement, loss of life and livelihoods, as well as impunity, remain widespread, and that this situation is compounded by women's marginalization in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes.

Against this background, Council reiterated its determination to take advantage of the Year of Peace and Security to further the AU agenda in this area, including addressing the root causes of conflicts, as well as promoting education on peace and respect for international humanitarian law, and to ensure that the commitments made to mitigate the vulnerabilities of women and children in armed conflicts are fully upheld.

In this respect, Council urged the AU Member States that have not yet done so, to ratify, domesticate and implement the AU Protocol on Women and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. Council encouraged the Commission to undertake high level visits to the countries concerned for them to urgently take the steps required of them. Council also highlighted the need to involve civil society and women's organizations in a coordinated advocacy campaign on the ratification, domestication and implementation of these instruments.

Council encouraged the Chairperson of the Commission to take the necessary steps to ensure the mainstreaming of gender aspects into the AU efforts aimed at promoting peace and security, including through the deployment of a gender expert in the AU Liaison Offices/Peace Support Operations, the appointment of women as Ambassadors of Peace, as part of the Year of Peace and Security and as Special Envoys/Representatives, as well as the involvement of women in peace processes. Council further encouraged the Chairperson of the Commission to appoint a Special Representative on Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children.

Council requested that the necessary steps be taken to ensure that the scope of the African Charter on the Rights of the Child is expanded to address the role of non-state actors in the violation of children's rights during armed conflicts.

Council stressed the need for harmonized reporting on the progress made by Member States in promoting women's and children's rights as provided for in relevant AU and international instruments, as well as that of closer links between the AU's human rights structures and the AU Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Council urged Member States to include progress on the implementation of the Protocol on the Rights of Women within their annual reports to the Assembly of the Union as required by the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and encouraged civil society to contribute, in the most appropriate manner, to the implementation of the Protocol on the Rights of Women and the African Charter on the Protection and Welfare of the Child and to participate actively in the overall efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability, in conformity with the provisions of article 20 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU.

Council also stressed the need to address the gender dimension of violence against children, to prioritise prevention by identifying the root causes of the vulnerabilities of women and children and to respond with recommendations to mitigate risk, while ensuring accountability and ending impunity by prosecuting perpetrators of violence against women and children at the national and regional levels.

Council agreed to devote every year an open session to the theme of women and children and other vulnerable groups in armed conflicts.