

CONCEPT NOTE

HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS, REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES(RECs) AND REGIONAL MECHANISMS (RMs) IN PROMOTING THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

DATES: 25th - 29TH JULY 2022 IN HARARE- ZIMBABWE

VENUE: Monomotapa Hotel

HOST:

THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE -Ministry of Youth, Sport, Art and Recreation

Contact Persons:

Dr. Rhuks Ako, Senior Analyst, Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, African Union Commission,
AkoR@africa-union.org / +251-912656294

Dr. Oita Etyang, Data Analyst, Peace and Security Department, COMESA OEtyang@comesa.int /+260979377090

Lavina Oluoch – CAAC Youth and CSOs in Peace building Programme office Save the Children Lavina.oluoch@savethechildren.org / +254708844188

Contextual Synopsis

Over the past two decades, most of the countries in the Southern African region have been relatively peaceful and stable, but the region still faces challenges of armed insurgency, and forms of protracted conflict. These conflicts have negatively impacted the life of the population in general as well as the life of young people in particular as more than 60% of the Southern Africa population is composed of youth under the age of 25¹. The UN World Population Statistics estimates that there are about 1.2 billion 15-24-year-olds in the world and that by 2030, the target date for the sustainable development goals, the number of youths is projected to have grown by 7 per cent, to nearly 1.3 billion in the world². By 2050, the populations of 28 countries in Africa are projected to double – with Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda among the top nine countries that will account for more than half of the world's population growth³. The trends further postulate that the youth bulge in Africa will have increased by 42 per cent with Africa's youth population expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055⁴.

The reality is that armed conflicts, political tensions, governance deficits, ethnic divisions and inequality, poverty and unemployment as well as other emerging threats to peace and security such as climate change, terrorism, transnational crimes and even COVID-19 have a destructive impact on a country's development. Each one and any combination of these elements affect economic growth, and immensely contribute to citizens' grievances – against the state and in other instances, ethnic intolerance- that last for generations, with groups such as children, youth, women, persons with disabilities, refugees and IDPs bearing the burdensome effects of resultant conflicts. Given the foregoing vast impact that conflict and wars have on the lives of the people as well as the development of nations, it is evident that sustainable development in our countries and regions cannot be achieved in a vacuum i.e., without sustainable peace, respect for human rights, good governance and rule of law. Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) on peace, justice and strong institutions aims at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development while recognizing that the world has become more divided- with some regions enjoying relative peace and security while others in endless cycles of conflicts.

The demographic argument is in all probability one of the most powerful and compelling reasons for recognizing the role of youth in building peace. Africa's population is comprised mainly of the youth (with the median age at approximately 19.5)⁵ and there is a burgeoning need within the continent to engage young people in the peacebuilding agenda given their immense potential to support and move the peace and security agenda forward. In particular, the African Youth

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_in_Africa

² <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/YouthPOP.pdf>

³ Overseas Development Institute, Africa's opportunity Reaping the early harvest of the demographic transition and ensuring no one is left behind(2017)-

<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11812.pdf>

⁴ Ibid n'3

⁵ Africa Population-<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/>

Charter (which defines the youth as between age 15 and 35 years) at Article 17 as well as the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2250, 2419 and 2535 (with the youth defined as between 15-24)⁶ underpin the significant roles the youth play in peacebuilding and calls for their increased participation in decision making processes as well as their meaningful engagement in negotiating and implementing peace agreements in conflict or transition settings

Although the United Nations Security Council adopted the resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security which recognizes that “*young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security*”, the youth have not been involved as they should in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. According Alpaslan Ozerdem (*The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities*, 26 October 2016), Young people vacillate between the two extremes of ‘infantilizing’ and ‘demonizing’. On one side, they are viewed as vulnerable, powerless and in need of protection, while on the other side, they are feared as dangerous, violent, and apathetic and as threats to security. Consequently, policy approaches and engagement strategies on the youth, peace and agenda tend to look at young people as a problem to solve rather than a voice to be listened to in solving conflict situations or building peace.

Nevertheless, many young people have been working individually or collectively to enhance, facilitate and promote peace in their communities through peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms. The Youth Café, highlight different approaches, tools and interventions that young people use to contribute to peacebuilding in their communities such as: strengthening community cohesion and reconciliation through intercommunal, religious and ethnic dialogues and events (e.g. exhibitions, plays, sports, concerts); building civic awareness through debates and public campaigns (e.g. peace walks, rallies and social media movements); engaging in community entrepreneurship and livelihoods programs through capacity building and trainings; advocating for the participation and inclusion of youth in decision-making by participating in conferences, producing policy papers, organizing forums; establishing partnerships, alliances, networks, councils and clubs to connect young peacebuilders, build their capacity and leadership, and promote their participation in peacebuilding frameworks.

The African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC)-mandated study titled ‘The Roles and Contribution of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa’ brings to the fore many untold stories of young women and men dedicated to contribute their quotas to advance ‘a peaceful and secure Africa’ as enshrined in Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063. The study which showcases diverse youth efforts across the entire peacebuilding continuum across the five regions of the continent was endorsed by the PSC at its 933rd meeting, held on 23 June 2020. The meeting, its third

⁶ Youth definition by United Nations General Assembly, The World Programme of Action for Youth in the Year 2000 and Beyond, A/RES/50/81 (1995)

annual open session on youth, peace and security, dedicated to the theme “Youth, Peace and Security: Advancing Youth Roles and Capacities for Silencing the Guns in Africa” recognized the essential roles and contributions youth make to peace and security in Africa, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the PSC consistently underlines the importance of robust and sustained synergy, coordination, partnership and collaboration between all relevant stakeholders, including the AU and its Member States, RECs/RMs, UN and development partners to advance the YPS agenda and avoid duplication of efforts. This was further reiterated in the communique of the 1067th meeting of the PSC held on 3rd March 2022. It is within this context that this partnership seeks to make specific contributions to the advancement of YPS in the Southern Africa regions.

Rationale and Justification

Over the last fifteen years, there has been tremendous and deliberate efforts across Africa towards including and recognizing the positive roles of young people as peacebuilders. This has taken both political goodwill as well as a series of legal and policy developments including:

- The African Youth Charter (AYC) was endorsed on 2 July 2006 by the African Union Heads of States and Governments meeting in Banjul (Gambia) The Charter is a political and legal document which serves as the strategic framework for African States, giving direction for youth empowerment and development at continental, regional and national levels. It highlights the importance of youth participation at Article 11 and emphasizes the role of youth in peace and security at Article 17.
- Three significant UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) emphasize the importance of youth as agents of change in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The resolutions are a positive move towards changing the narrative of youth being portrayed as either perpetrators or victims, and elevates their roles and responsibilities as peacebuilders.
- Two independent expert studies- The Missing Peace and the Study on the Roles and Contributions in Africa were commissioned by the United Nations and the African Union Peace and Security Council respectively- and a global policy paper-We are Here to understand the diversity and complexity of young people’s engagement in peace processes as well as showcase the different initiatives or challenges that the young people encounter in promoting peace.
- In June 2020, the African Union Peace and Security Council adopted the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security affirming the roles and responsibilities that the youth play in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict settings. The framework acknowledges the conscious actions and processes to protect young people from armed conflict and insecurity and seeks to promote and support their contributions towards peace efforts. The framework also highlights the major and specific objectives of which it seeks to achieve; identifies gaps and challenges confronting youth involvement in peace and security; enumerates the cardinal priorities as well as proposes criteria for effective programming on

youth, peace and security. It is expected that the framework will guide the development of continental and regional strategic plans but most importantly the development and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) on YPS.

- Varied global, regional, national campaigns/ initiatives and youth programs to promote the youth, peace and security agenda including the Silencing the Guns and the I million by 2021 initiative, (the initiative was able to reach over 8 million young people across Africa through education, employment, entrepreneurship, and engagement (the 4Es). The results form the basis of AU's I million next level initiative), development of Early Warning Systems by different RECs and the mainstreaming of youth in regional strategies, policies, e.g. by ECOWAS/ IGAD/ EAC/ECCAS/ COMESA/ SADC etc. For the Southern Africa Regions some of these initiatives and frameworks include inter alia SADC's Regional indicative strategic development plan (RISDP 2020-2030), SADC's regional early warning center, COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN), as well as COMESA Internship Programmes.

Despite these efforts the contributions of the young people in Africa in peacebuilding remain mostly unseen, understated and undocumented and marred with challenges including lack of representation/limited participation in decision making processes, inequalities and marginalization, negative social and public attitudes, inadequate resources and finances, limited awareness on legal and policy frameworks, ineffective accountability mechanisms as well as lack of coordination⁷. Additionally, an existing wide distrust gap between policymakers, governments and young peacebuilders in country-contexts remains a huge obstacle for the YPS agenda.⁸ Additionally, the second YPS report by the Secretary General on youth, peace and security since the Security Council adopted UNSCR 2250 (2015) was released in March 2022. The report in appreciating the growing recognition of young people's roles in preventing and resolving conflicts and in sustaining peace by governments, UN entities, civil society actors and other stakeholders also continued to highlight that some core challenges to this agenda still remain including structural barriers limiting the participation of young people and their capacity to influence decision-making; violations of their human rights; and insufficient investment in facilitating their inclusion and empowerment further exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic.

In order to effectively include and increase the participation of young people in decision making processes particularly relating to peace and security, there has to be conscientious efforts to include them in policies and strategies that speak not only to their diverse needs as the youth are not a homogeneous group but also afford them the opportunity and spaces to actively take roles and responsibilities in contributing to the peace agenda.

⁷ Resolution 2535- <https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/200805-Brief-Assessment-of-UNSC-Resolution-2535-Final-version-clean-version-R8699.pdf>

⁸ UNSCR 2535: unpacking the latest UN Security Council Resolution on YPS
<https://www.conducivespace.org/unsr-2535- unpacking-the-latest-un-security-council-resolution-on-yps/>

Given the wide mistrust between governments, policy makers and the young people particularly on governance, peace and security issues, as well as new and emerging threats to peace and security across the African continent, it is important to rethink the structural, situational and individual barriers that limit the capacities of the youth and innovatively build forward together for and with the young people.

It is against this backdrop, and the positive reflections and outcomes of the first High-level Youth ministerial conference for the East and Horn Africa countries held in November 2021, that the African Union Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department (PAPS), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Save the Children international intend to organize the first-ever High-Level Youth Ministerial Conference targeting RECs, RMs, relevant Ministries in the Southern Africa Region and National Youth Councils in the region to deliberate on how they can better support, promote and invest in young peacebuilders in the region by advocating for stronger and inclusive policy formulation while sharing best practices to strengthen collaboration and accountability mechanisms amongst themselves. Additionally, the conference is meant to feed into the International Youth Day which will be observed on the 12 August 2022 with the hope that some of the discussions will inform policy reviews and or actual implementation and adoption of international and regional legal and policy frameworks as well as strategies that advance the youth, peace and security agenda such as NAPs for the Southern Africa Region.

Additionally, as part of the continental social media mapping campaign on mapping of youth -led initiatives and organizations in peacebuilding by Save the Children in partnership with a range of diverse stakeholders including the youth, youth-led/ focused organizations, governments, RECs, private sector etc that was launched during the International Youth Day 2021 (12 August) - i.e. **the #2250-Africa Series Campaign: Our Shared Vision of Peace** this conference will address the Participation Pillar as to actualizing meaningful engagement of youth particularly in policy making decision relating to peace and security as well as highlight the importance of the Partnerships Pillar under the UNSCR 2250, particularly between governments, RECs, RMs and the youth for a peaceful and secure Africa as envisaged under Agenda 2063.

Furthermore, the conference will be the precursor to the First Regional Capacity Building of National Youth Councils, Youth-Based, Youth-Focused Organizations on the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative. The recommendations and highlights from the conference will be shared and disseminated and regional actionable interventions on Silencing the Guns initiatives agreed on by the Youth representatives for implementation.

Target Audience and Participants

The High-Level Ministerial Conference is the first of its kind for the Southern Africa Region and hopes to bring together RECs, RM, government officials (particularly from the Ministries of Youth Affairs and Foreign Affairs) and development partners for this Region for a four-day programme that will primarily focus on supporting, promoting and investing in the youth, peace and security agenda for the region. In particular, discussions will primarily center on the efficacy or otherwise of legal and policy frameworks on YPS for the region and the continent; the inclusion of youth in policy and decision-making processes; create a platform to discuss the development of National Strategies and the NAPs to ensure participation and quota of young people in decision-making processes; as well as afford a platform for the ongoing continental discussion on the African Union theme of the, “Silencing the guns” and emerging threats to peace and security for the region.

More specifically:

- The AU, SADC, and COMESA Secretariat / Departments for Peace and Security; including but not limited to the Directorates of Peace and the Executive Secretaries;
- Ministers and Deputy Ministers from the Ministries of Youth Affairs and Foreign within Southern Africa Region (Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, Eswatini and Comoros)
- Youth leaders from the National Youth Councils within the Southern Africa Region as well as the AU Youth Envoy, African Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa (AYAP) representative, and COMESA Youth ambassador;
- Community Youth Leaders from countries in the East, Horn and Southern Africa.
- Development Partners including Save the Children, and UN affiliated agencies etc.

Forum Objectives

- To advocate for more inclusive participation and meaningful engagement with young people as an asset in peacebuilding and conflict prevention mechanisms.
- To review and assess the implementation of international and regional legal and policy frameworks for youth in peace and security for different countries in Southern Africa.
- To popularize regional, national and continental legal and policy frameworks that seek to promote youth role in peace and security.
- To showcase and highlight the varied initiatives and programmes developed or endorsed by governments, RECs and RMs to capacitate young people in Southern Africa particularly as relating to advancing peace and security including early warning systems such as COMWARN and SADC Early Warning System.

- To establish regional forum to support and enhance youth roles in peace and security – (i.e. Regional Youth Council);
- To advocate for the development and implementation of National Action Plan (NAPs) by Member States on YPS in line with the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) and its 10-Year Implementation Plan;
- To strengthen capacity of the existing National Youth Councils (NYC) to enable them to carry out their mandates effectively.
- To create partnerships between CSO, INGOs, governments, regional bodies (RECs and RMs), Continental body (AU), International and Global Development partners around varied conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms across the region.
- To amplify youth voices as champion of peace by affording them a platform to share their experiences including existing opportunities and challenges;
- To promote and protect civic spaces for the engagement and participation of young people and organizations in peace processes peace building.
- To advocate for periodic consultations providing opportunity for stakeholders to engage and share updates on youth peace and security agenda.

Conference Deliverables

- Advocacy for inclusive policies and increased participation and meaningful engagement of young people in decision making processes and programmes by governments and regional bodies.
- Increased understanding of the current YPS initiatives across the Southern Africa Region by the varied governments, RECs and RMs and the AU, including limitations and successes
- Emphasis on partnerships and the significance of governments, AU, RECS/RMs, development partners and the young people working together in advancing the youth, peace and security agenda for the Southern Africa Region
- Development of policy brief/ communique to inform policy changes following review of the international and regional legal and policy frameworks in the Region

***** THE END*****