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Presentation

By

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On the Commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month

Lome, Togo

05 September 2022

Excellency Professor Robert Dussy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and Togolese Abroad

Excellency Amma Adomaa Twu-Amoah, Chairperson of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC)

Excellency Commissioner Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political affairs, Peace and Security

Excellencies Members of the PSC

Representative of the UN

Executive Secretary RECSA

Esteemed Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honored to make this presentation on *“Silencing the guns in Africa”*, one of the flagship projects of the African Union’s *“Agenda 2063”*.

Allow me also to join His Excellency Commissioner Bankole to commend the Peace and Security Council (PSC) for its initiative to commemorate the Africa Amnesty Month this year in a Member State, in partnership with national institutions/organizations, ECOWAS, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, civil society, as well as partners. This is in line with the decision of our Heads of State and Government taken at the 14th Extraordinary Summit on *Silencing the Guns*, held on 6 December 2020. In it, the Assembly decided to extend the implementation of the AU master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns to the year 2030 and stressed the imperative to domesticate this Agenda, in particular the commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month.

A similar compliment goes to the Togolese Republic, ECOWAS, the UNODA, and other international partners, for their participation and contributions to the success of the meeting. Merci beaucoup.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

As you may recall, the Heads of State and Government, during the 50th Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity/African Union (OAU/AU) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 25th May 2013, reaffirmed their political will to take decisive action to put an end to conflicts and crises in Africa, in line with the AU Constitutive Act and the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council. This is essentially through eradicating the underlying root causes, triggers, and related fueling factors towards a peaceful and secure Africa, with good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights, justice and rule of law, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Subsequently, in order to translate the vision of the Solemn Declaration into practical steps and implementable actions, the PSC developed the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by Year 2020, which was adopted by the AU Assembly during its 29th Ordinary Session, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2017. The AU Master Roadmap sets out practical steps to address the underlying drivers of conflict, as well as the tools and enablers of violence articulated in five aspects: political, economic, social environmental and legal.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will agree with me that addressing the issue of the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons is central to the attainment of the goal of silencing the guns in Africa. Small arms and light weapons are the primary tools used in, and multipliers of, violence and conflicts in the continent. Therefore, controlling the illicit proliferation and circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons is a vital component of the AU Master roadmap.

Over the past decades, and further to the Roadmap, important policy and legal instruments have been adopted at the Continental and regional levels in response to the significant effects caused by the illicit small arms and light weapons. The main Continental instrument is the ‘Bamako Declaration on a common African position on illicit arms trafficking and proliferation of small arms’ of 2000, and the ‘African Union Strategy on the Control of Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons of 2013. The RECs have also adopted regional instruments on the fight against illicit firearms. Whereas these instruments exist, their effective implementation remains a challenge.

The Commissioner, in his statement, made reference to a study conducted by the AU Commission in partnership with the Small Arms Survey, which paints a picture of a serious problem of illicit firearms in the continent. The **Africa Amnesty month** is an opportunity for Member States to address the problem of illicit firearms in their territories. In this regard, the PSC may wish to not only encourage Member States to observe the Africa Amnesty Month but also to adapt and incorporate the Africa Amnesty Month in their national legislation in order to encourage civilians to hand over their arms without any fear of being arrested or prosecuted.

In 2018, the Commission was able to provide modest funding in support of four (4) Member States to implement activities under the Africa Amnesty Month. For the following three (years) the Commission has collaborated with the UNODA to provide financial and technical support to at least three Member States per year. So far, support has been extended to Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Kenya. This year, Liberia, Tanzania and Togo are receiving support.

The activities being undertaken by the Member States are aimed at promoting sensitization campaigns at national level on voluntary surrender of illicit firearms, collection of illicit weapons and arms destruction.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Silencing the guns in Africa requires multi-pronged and multi-sectoral efforts that should address the demand for weapons in a holistic manner. The expanding inter-communal conflicts exacerbated by environmental and climate change continues to fuel trafficking of arms because of the demand for self-protection by the affected communities. The proliferation of Illicit arms is also linked to the various forms violence that the continent is witnessing. Key among these is the growing threat of terrorism in the Continent. All these forms of armed violence create the demand for illicit weapons.

Whilst Member States are expected to report on the commemoration of the Africa Amnesty month, reporting has been limited. Despite the existence of policy frameworks at regional, continental and international levels, their effective implementation remains a challenge. These are two areas we are committed to putting more focus in order to scale up implementation and reporting.

Without going into details, I would also like to note that the Commission is implementing the recommendations of the 12th meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security (STCDSS), held in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2019, to conduct a study on the ostensible relations between the proliferation of illicit SALWs and terrorism. The study is expected to provide evidenced-based data on the nature and scope of the threat, and to make actionable recommendations on the way forward in responding to the threat.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding, allow me to underline the following:

- **First**, an arm without ammunition is just a mere piece of steel of iron and wood. Therefore, addressing the issue of illicit arms should go hand in hand with combatting the illicit inflow and circulation of ammunition, mismanagement of national stockpiles by some security agencies.
- **Second**, success in implementing the Africa Amnesty Month depends largely on the effective mobilization and inclusion of all stakeholders, including Civil Society, in particular women and youth, faith-based organizations, the private sector, think tanks and the media.
- **Third**, there is need for Member states to report to the Commission on the activities undertaken in implementation of the Africa Amnesty Month. This will enable us to document lessons learned and best practice. It will also allow the Commission to monitor and evaluate implementation of the AU Master Roadmap in line with the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism that was adopted by the PSC in June 2021.
- **Fourth**, underlying root causes, triggers, and related factors that lead to the demand for arms among communities, including social, political, economic, religious factors should be addressed in a holistic, comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- **Finally**, our collective efforts to silence the guns can only be realized if we tackle the issues of governance, livelihoods and manage our diverse demographics in a comprehensive and sustainable. There is an imperative to revisit the social contract across the continent as a way of meeting our objective of a conflict free and prosperous Africa.

I thank you for your kind attention.

African Union Commission (AUC)

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Statement by Alhaji Sarjoh Bah (PhD), Director of Conflict Management, on the Commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month on 5 September 2022, Lome, Togo

Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department

African Union Commission

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