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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
692ND MEETING

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
13 JUNE 2017

PSC/PR/BR. (DCXCII)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), dedicated its 692nd meeting held on 13 June 2017, to an Open Session on the theme: “Ending Child Marriages”.

Council took note of the opening statements by the PSC Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Susan Sikaneta of the Republic of Zambia, and by the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, H.E. Mrs Amira El Fadil. Council also took note of the presentations made by: the AU Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriages, Madame Marie-Christine Boucoum; the Deputy Representative of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Ethiopia, Dr. Shalini Bahuguna; Deputy Country Director of Save the Children in Somalia, Mr. Ebrima Saidy; and the Deputy Regional Director of Plan International for Eastern and Southern Africa, Mr. David MacDonald. Council further took note of statements made by representatives of AU Member States, the diplomatic community and international organizations.

Council and participants expressed concern over the fact that cases of child marriages and other forms of abuses to children, particularly young girls, have significantly been on the increase in a number of countries in Africa.

Council and participants acknowledged that promoting the rights of women and girls is very critical, not only in harnessing Africa’s demographic dividend, but also in achieving the sustainable development objectives of AU Agenda 2063 and UN Agenda 2030. They also acknowledged that child marriage directly affects the health, rights, well-being and future of children, particularly girls. They further noted that child marriages have a lasting negative impact not only on the victims, but also on their families and communities and that, besides hurting economies, it also perpetuates intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Council and participants stressed that keeping girls in schools is one of the most effective instruments to end child marriages. In this regard, they urged Member States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and to develop refugee education action plans, with a view to providing inclusive and quality education in refugee situations in Africa. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of empowering young girls at risk and those already in child marriages, with the necessary information on sexual and reproductive health, as well as on life skills and support networks.

Council underlined the need for Member States to criminalize child marriages, with a view to deterring and severely punishing perpetrators of child abuse and marriage. In the same

context, Council and Participants also underlined the importance of putting in place appropriate mechanisms for the provision of psychosocial support and mental, as well as reproductive health services for victims of child abuse, including child marriages.

Council and participants underscored the importance of training all peacekeepers in child safeguarding, as well as of providing orientation to national defense and security forces of the Member States on issues relating to children's rights, in order to ensure that appropriate protective measures are put in place for children who are victims of abuse and exploitation, including child marriages, particularly girls in emergency or conflict situations.

Council and participants stressed the need to promote and implement integrated and gender-transformative programming that addresses the root causes, including gender inequality, discriminatory socio-cultural norms and institutions, as well as to advocate legislation and policies that promote gender equality.

Council and participants welcomed the adoption of the Joint General Comment on Child Marriage by the AU Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR). In the same context, and while welcoming the appointment of the AU Special Rapporteur on Child Marriage, participants reiterated the call for the AU to appoint a Special Envoy for Children Affected by Armed Conflicts.

Council and participants urged Member States to adopt the universal minimum marriage age of 18 years. In this context, they commended all Member States which have already signed and ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), as well as the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and urged those which have not yet done so, to do the same, as soon as possible. Council stressed the importance of Member States to fully implement the Africa Common Position to End Child Marriage, also known as «The Sandton Commitment to Ending Child Marriage», which was adopted by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2015, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Council acknowledged that the campaign to end child marriages is gaining momentum in parts of the continent. In this regard, Council commended those Member States which have already launched national campaigns to end child marriages and urged the other Member States to also do so.

Council commended H.E. President Edgar Lungu of the Republic of Zambia for being the champion of ending child marriages in Africa and pledged to work closely with him and the AU

Department of Social Affairs, to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to end child marriages in Africa.

Council also commended all partners, which are supporting the AU Campaign to End Child Marriages, particularly the European Union (EU), Norway and the United States of America (USA). Council commended both, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), for their Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriages in eight African countries, namely, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia. In the same context, Council commended Civil Society Organizations for their active role in promoting awareness of, and in campaigning for, ending child marriages.

Council requested the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution to develop monitoring and reporting mechanisms for abuse of children in the Member States, including child marriages both, in peace and conflict settings.

Council also requested the AU Commission to take the necessary steps to ensure enhanced awareness raising and civic education campaigns on ending abuse and exploitation of children, including child marriages. In the same context, Council stressed the importance of engaging traditional and religious leaders, with a view to raising their awareness of the need to urgently end harmful practices against children, particularly child marriages. In this respect, Council requested the Commission to dedicate more activities to Ending Child Marriages in Africa, with the active participation of traditional and religious leaders, as well as members of Parliament.

Participants requested Council to devote an open session, once every year, to the theme of “Ending Child Marriages”, with a view to update Member States and the other participants on the status of progress in combating the phenomenon.

Council agreed to remain seized of the matter.