

United Nations  
Office to the African Union



Bureau des Nations Unies  
auprès de l'Union Africaine

UNOAU

Remarks for Mr. Gerald Mitchell  
Deputy Head of the  
United Nations Office to the African Union and  
Director of Political Affairs

African Union Side Event

“Ensuring the right to equitable and inclusive quality education to break and prevent cycles of violence in Africa, by harnessing the development and peace potential of the people to achieve the Africa we want.”

Addis Ababa, 13 February 2024

Distinguished guests,  
Esteemed colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to first thank the African Union, and other partners here today, for organizing this timely discussion on “ensuring the right to equitable and inclusive quality education to break and prevent cycles of violence in Africa.” Education can prevent conflict as well as support in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and it can contribute to the goals of the Agenda 2063, as well as the AU initiative of Silencing the Guns in 2030.

Today’s discussion provides us an invaluable opportunity to discuss the interlinkages between access to quality education and peace, security, and development. Nelson Mandela was known to frequently, and rightfully, assert that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Indeed, education is a potent force for good in the world today and, in that regard, I would like to highlight three key points that we should consider.

**First**, it is important we recognize the peace, security, and development nexus. As Secretary-General has underscored in his “A New Agenda for Peace,” conflict prevention and sustainable peace and development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and necessary to address the interlinked, multidimensional drivers of violence and conflict. As societies grapple with the complex dynamics of conflict, it becomes increasingly evident that investing in prevention yields dividends not only in averting violence but also in fostering long-term stability and prosperity.

A key pillar of this is recognizing the centrality of education to conflict prevention and sustainable development. Education is vital to the empowerment of marginalized communities, providing them with opportunities for socio-economic advancement, including women and girls. For this reason, it is thus not surprising that the UN recognizes attacks against schools as one of the six grave violations against children.

**Second**, linked to the peace, security, and development nexus, is the need to focus on comprehensive approaches. This is essential for effective prevention, and can be further strengthened through effective partnerships, and national ownership. It is important to link different lines of effort to create synergy and foster whole-of-system and whole-of-society approaches to make conflict prevention strategies more effective, robust, and durable.

In addition, education is a comprehensive approach that is vital to our Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) initiatives, particularly in curbing the recruitment of youth and children into conflict by armed groups. As the UN Secretary-General has noted, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration emphasizes the important role of prevention especially in the context of mitigating the recruitment by armed groups, notably of children and youth. Attention should not only be given to those leaving armed groups, but also focus on decreasing the incentive for children and youth to join these groups. Promoting education, linked to jobs and livelihoods will, in that regard, help break conflict cycles and promote effective conflict prevention. I would like to take a moment to commend and

recognize the important work that is being done under the auspices of the AU, UN, and World Bank partnership in DDR.

Allow me to **conclude** by emphasizing the need for inclusivity, with a particular focus on enhancing the participation of children and youth. Africa is expected to benefit from a demographic boom: not only is it home to some of the fastest growing economies, but it also has the youngest population. In this regard, youth need to be included in decision-making and the implementation of programs, such as DDR initiatives, going forward, ensuring the development of youth-specific strategies that are relevant to their specific needs and interests.

I greatly look forward to the discussions during this side event. It is important to share experiences and to build on lessons learned and increase our understanding of how the right to education, using a human rights approach, can strengthen resilience and prevent and mitigate violent conflict.

The United Nations looks forward to continuing the partnership and to work collaboratively towards sustainable peace in Africa and preventing conflict and violence by focusing on a joint approach towards peace, security and development which strengthens a comprehensive approach focused on inclusivity.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.