



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE TO THE AFRICAN UNION

Remarks by

Mr Parfait Onanga-Anyanga
Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union (SRSG)
& Head of UNOAU,

on

Commemorating 2023 Africa Youth Day

Today, as we gather to celebrate Africa Youth Day, let us recognize the incredible potential and applaud the achievements of our youth, while also critically assessing the challenges they face on this vast and diverse continent. Under the banner of this year's theme, "1 Million, Next Level is Knocking: Youth-led Movements that Transcend Borders," we embark on a journey to harness the immense potential of Africa's youth.

At the heart of this celebration is a profound reality – young people are both the present and future of Africa! They carry with them the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of a continent poised on the brink of a renaissance.

Africa is home to the world's youngest population, with more than 70% of its people under the age of 30. This demographic fact carries the promise of an energetic and innovative Africa, ready to consolidate its place on the global stage.

Africa's youth are also the stewards of peace. They have the power to shape Africa's destiny by fostering reconciliation and unity in societies marked by historical divisions. Young people play a pivotal role in fostering inter-generational dialogue, a crucial component of youth participation in sustaining peace.

We must recognize their fundamental role in bridging the gap between generations and paving the way for a more peaceful and harmonious Africa.

Since 2018, the African Union has been making commendable progress in institutionalizing and implementing the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda across Africa. In this time, the African Union launched the '1 Million by 2021' youth-focused initiative and its principal youth program, the Youth for Peace Program (Y4P).

These initiatives have succeeded in enhancing youth participation in peace and security efforts, engaging young people through regional consultations to ensure that their voices and perspectives are not just heard but also acted upon, including by their active participation in decision-making.

I applaud the work of the African Union Youth Envoy and the five African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) who represent each region and champion the youth

policy agenda at the continental and regional level. **Their dedication and commitment are inspirational.**

I want to also recognize the AU's operationalization of the 'wise-youth' initiative, a program within the Panel of the Wise, which underscores the AU's commitment to enhancing youth participation in preventive diplomacy, dialogue, and mediation across Africa.

This is a significant step forward, and it reaffirms the importance of involving young people in the processes that determine the peace and stability of the Continent.

I commend the AU Peace and Security Council for its unwavering commitment to implementing the Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security (CFYPS) and for prioritizing the YPS agenda in its work.

It is truly remarkable that this year's Informal Joint Seminar between the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council marked the first time that Youth, Peace, and Security was featured on the agenda, and **this is a testament to the growing recognition of the vital role that youth play in shaping the future of peace and security, not just in Africa but across the globe.**

My office continues to be a strong advocate for the youth, peace, and security initiative, and it remains a core objective for UNOAU.

Over the years, UNOAU has worked hand in hand with the AU to bolster Youth, Peace, and Security activities, such as observing the annual Peace Day and participating in the month-long celebration of Africa Youth Month.

My office has been instrumental in ensuring the meaningful participation of young people from Africa at the 78th UN General Assembly and continues to support the AU Youth Envoy and the Youth Ambassadors for Peace in their mission to promote the meaningful engagement and participation of young people in peace and security efforts.

Furthermore, UNOAU, in collaboration with the AU and other partners, has developed robust youth engagement strategies and initiatives aimed at furthering the contributions of youth in peace and security.

For instance, the launch of "Mission 55 Conflict in Anaka," an online video game that sensitizes youth to conflict resolution processes on the Continent, is a testament to our commitment to empowering young people.

As we embark on this year's Africa Youth Month, I **extend my heartfelt call to all of Africa's youth to actively participate and share their ideas.**

Your energy, your creativity, and your determination are the driving forces that are shaping the Continent and will define its future. **It is your voices, your dreams, and your actions that will propel Africa to new heights.**

Let us come together as one, with unwavering resolve, to celebrate our youth and to empower them to lead the way towards a brighter, more peaceful, freer and more prosperous Africa. Wishing you all a wonderful Youth day!
