Dear Readers,

It is an honour to present the first edition of UNOAU’s Monthly Newsletter for 2020, which highlights activities and initiatives, such as the launch of “She Stands for Peace,” a joint publication by UNOAU and the African Union Commission that captures the stories of 20 outstanding African women and women-led organisations working tirelessly towards the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda on the continent.

The world as we know it has changed in many ways since the last ordinary summit of Heads of State and Government in February. Today, we know just how much the COVID-19 pandemic is severely impacting the whole world with far-reaching consequences in the public health arena, the political, economic, social and peace and security spheres, and especially for those of us who live and work on the African continent. The human toll in sub-Saharan Africa is likely to be significant, with projections in a worst-case scenario as many as 110 million people will be infected by COVID-19.

In the peace and security sphere, the pandemic is having a major impact on already vulnerable regions, such as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. The challenge of the COVID-19 response has also compounded the difficulties faced by countries going through transitions as we are seeing in South Sudan and has slowed progress in countries dealing with cross-border disputes, as well as affecting the timelines and preparations for elections. In the Sahel, Libya and Somalia extremist groups and other parties to conflict continue to commit heinous attacks against civilians and security forces, with no regard to the call for a global ceasefire made by the UN Secretary-General and reiterated by the AUC Chairperson to create the space for mobilisation towards an effective COVID-19 response. We would like to reiterate their call as this is the time to create the space to work towards solutions to the ongoing conflict situations and not to inflict more misery on communities affected by conflict.

During these unprecedented times the protection of marginalised and vulnerable groups is particularly important because the pandemic affects these groups more severely. In this regard, the need to ensure protection and support for refugees and internally displaced persons, and to pause the deportation of irregular migrants.

Women and children are especially vulnerable in times of lockdown and are at risk of increased domestic violence and abuse as well as sexual exploitation where there are violent and abusive family members and/or breadwinners have succumbed to COVID-19 leaving the family with few options for earning income.
This year is the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security and as we commemorate this important resolution that promotes the participation of women in matters of peacebuilding, the lesson that has been learnt over the last two decades in building resilient societies is that inclusivity is key.

A lot of progress has been made over the years in the implementation of the African Governance Architecture and the promotion of good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Within that context it is our collective responsibility to ensure that temporary curtailments of freedoms (lockdowns and curfews) undertaken in extraordinary circumstances to curb the spread of COVID-19 do not continue for any longer than is necessary. Similarly, emergency measures must not be used as a pretext to permanently expand the executive powers or limit the human rights space. This is especially important in the effort to protect the gains made in the effort to promote democracy and good governance as several African Union member states prepare for elections in the second half of the year.

In the face of these and many other challenges, we are particularly encouraged by African solidarity, collaboration and leadership we have witnessed during the past few months. The Bureau of the Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government, under the Chair of South Africa, has acted swiftly and decisively and has fostered important discussions with key stakeholders, such as regional actors and the private sector.

Most leaders of African Union Member States have also communicated clearly and consistently, with response strategies based on science and sound expert advice. The development of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19, the establishment of the Continental COVID-19 Response Fund and its Board of Trustees, the formation of Ministerial Committees, the commitment and effort being made to strengthen the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), as well as efforts to mobilise international support, including the appointment of four AU Special Envoys, are all crucial and commendable steps in winning this fight.

We have indeed come a long way, but there is still some distance to travel and the partnership between the United Nations, the African Union and our member states will grow stronger as we work together to build back better. The cooperation between WHO AFRO and Africa CDC is a demonstration of what the will to work together to make a positive impact can achieve. The UN Secretary-General has repeatedly emphasised: "We are in this together – and we will get through this, together".

My colleagues and I in UNOAU are committed to being part of this effort, while not losing sight of the peace and security challenges we must continue to address.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of UNOAU,
Hanna S. Tetteh
Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme signed in Addis Ababa

The United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) signed the three-year Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme on 27 April. The Initiative will work towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. Funded by the EU, the programme will focus on the strengthening of AU member state legislation and policy processes in the specified areas, the generation of quality and reliable data and support to women’s movements and relevant civil society organisations. The design and implementation of the programme is guided by the AU’s Agenda 2063, the priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as other key regional instruments. The UN implementing partners that will work with the AU through the African Union Commission on the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme are UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Read more

African Union Continental Strategy on Countering Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) in Africa

As part of the African Union (AU) Technical Working Group on Countering Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED), UNOAU contributed to the draft strategy on countering-IEDs on the African Continent; particularly in support of ongoing AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) in Somalia, Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel region. Sharing expertise from UNOAU’s Operational Planning and Advisory Section (OPAS), were Mr. Abel Tesfai, Mine Action Officer and Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Sohail, Military Planning Officer.

The strategy suggests systematic, practical and workable action plans; bringing together existing national and regional infrastructures and responses as initiated by the individual AU member states and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to mitigate the effects of IED attacks. The draft will be reviewed by the AU Commission before its submission to the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security (STCDSS) for consideration and approval by the end of 2020.
Bolstering UN-AU partnership in the Central African Republic

On May 8, the UNOAU supported the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) and African Union Observer Mission in the Central African Republic (MOUACA), which specifies the procedures for deployment, safety and security, and logistical support for activities assigned by the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC).

Throughout the process, UNOAU’s Mission Support Planning Unit (Muhammad Taufiq, Programme Management Officer and Colonel Tariq Sohail, Military Planning Officer) provided a key facilitation role between the two missions and between the UN Headquarters and AU. The AU PSOD colleagues Sanni Mama, Senior Mission Support Officer, Colonel Vincent Gnamolende, Operations Officer and Bonaventure Cakpo Guedegbe, Political Officer were also involved in the process.

The MoU is considered a milestone achievement, which will bolster UN-AU’s future partnership in the accomplishment of designated mandates in the Central African Republic (CAR). The AUPSC at its 848th meeting welcomed the Commission’s actions on the deployment and operationalisation of the Joint Special Security Units (USMS) and the Military Observers Mission. It is also mandated to coordinate and operationalise support from MINUSCA in CAR through close involvement of UNOAU. The USMS, comprising of members from the armed group combatants and the Central African Republic’s forces, were one of the significant security structures established by the 2019 Peace Accord.

On-going fighting in Libya cause for concern amid efforts to bring warring parties to dialogue

The ongoing fighting in Libya is a continuing concern for the United Nations and the African Union. In her address to the Security Council on 19 May, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, Stephanie Williams reported that despite determined efforts and the Secretary-General’s plea for an immediate ceasefire to allow Libyans to respond to the common threat of COVID-19, there has been no lull in the fighting between the Government of National Accord (GNA) forces and the “Libyan National Army,” also known as the “Libyan Arab Armed Forces” (LAAF.) Instead, fighting has escalated with an unprecedented increase in indirect fire in urban areas and a growing tide of suffering for civilians.
On 10 May, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat similarly expressed concern about the situation in Libya stating that he was monitoring the situation in the country with great concern. Chairperson Faki noted the dramatic worsening of the security and humanitarian situation, despite numerous calls for a ceasefire, including by the UN Secretary-General. He further called for a cessation of any external interference in Libya, which was in violation of the Berlin Declaration of January 2020. The Chairperson underscored that the AU, through its High-Level Committee on Libya and the International Contact Group (Contact Group) for Libya, remained seized of the situation and was mobilising to contribute to ongoing peace efforts.

The Contact Group was established on the margins of the 33rd African Union Summit which was held in Addis Ababa in February 2020. Soon afterwards, the Contact Group met in Oyo, Congo-Brazzaville on March 12. This meeting marked an AU-led initiative in efforts to find lasting peaceful solutions for the conflict in Libya. At this first meeting, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, described the Contact Group as “an excellent opportunity for Africa to express its leadership on the issue”.

Additionally, the Contact Group held a virtual meeting on 19 May at which it once again expressed its deep concern about the political deadlock in Libya, the serious deterioration of the security situation in the country and the continuation of fighting between the belligerents to the detriment of the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people. The Contact Group deplored the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Libya, compounded to the extreme by the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). The Group strongly condemned the numerous violations of the International Humanitarian Law that could constitute war crimes, such as the attacks on hospitals and vital facilities, the persistent indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and the impediments to humanitarian access.

The Contact Group reiterated its support for the conclusions of the Berlin Conference, its firm condemnation of the continued foreign interference and violations of the arms embargo and reaffirmed the need to combat terrorism in Libya. The Contact Group expressed its deep concern about the disastrous consequences of the continued fighting in Libya on all neighbouring countries and the African Continent and further reiterated its commitment to pursue efforts to engage the Libyan parties in dialogue, in close cooperation with the United Nations and the rest of the international community.
Africa Day celebrations reflect on Silencing the Guns

On the occasion of Africa Day held on May 25, a webinar was organised by the African Union (AU) Department of Peace and Security under the Silencing the Guns Initiative. The organisers used this opportunity to sensitize and generate interest on the nexus between peace and development. This year’s theme, ‘Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development’ addressed the underlying issues that drive people to resort to firearms. Along with the AUC Chairperson, AU Commissioners from the Departments of Peace and Security, Political Affairs and Social Affairs, and other scholars as well as the SRSG to the African Union and Head of UNOAU Hanna Tetteh delivered remarks.

In her statement, SRSG Tetteh said, “over the last 57 years, the OAU and the AU have been an important strategic partner for the United Nations based on shared values, mutual respect, common interests and a deep commitment to Africa’s peace and prosperity”. She further noted that the UN-AU partnership in peace and security continues to grow citing examples of engagements in countries like the Central Africa Republic, South Sudan and even Somalia where the UN-AU supported the transitional governments to establish peace for their citizens.

On COVID-19, SRSG Tetteh welcomed the solidarity and leadership witnessed on the continent and echoed the calls by the UN Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the AU Commission for a global ceasefire in light of the pandemic. She further stressed on the need for the protection for marginalised groups such as refugees, Internally Displaces Persons (IDPs), persons with disabilities and migrants, as well as women and children.

AUC Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat in his statement said, “in spite of its huge economic potential, and its rich, young and dynamic human capital, most African States have difficulties in ensuring the welfare of their populations. Key sectors such as education, health and security are largely dependent on foreign aid. Communitarianism and tribalism have become more marked due to multiparty systems and democratic principles that have often been perverted. Ranging from open crises, caused by terrorism and inter-tribal or inter-religious conflicts to post-electoral crises, Africa is constantly beset, here and there, by scenes of violence, fragility and uncertainty over the future.”

The Chairperson reiterated his commitment to silencing the guns on the continent and expressed urgent need for Africa to develop new forms of resilience. He further stressed that the only way to contain COVID-19 and its disastrous effects, is to ensure food sufficiency, create millions of jobs, and save hundreds of millions of African citizens, who are currently seriously exposed to pandemics and various other hazards. This entails a real outpouring of solidarity for a truly strong and lasting African resilience.

‘On Africa Day, I reaffirm my total solidarity with the people and Governments of Africa in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and paving the way for recovery and a better future for all.”

UN SG António Guterres, message on Africa Day, 25 May 2020
2020 Africa Dialogue Series explores Silencing the Guns in the context of COVID-19

This year, the annual Africa Dialogue Series (ADS) which convenes ahead of the annual Africa Day commemoration, sought to raise political awareness on the African Union (AU) Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa (AUMR) by fostering greater engagement from non-state actors including women and youth; advocate for the UN Security Council Resolution 2457 (2019) on Silencing the Guns in Africa, and amplify the UN Secretary-General’s Appeal for a Global Ceasefire, particularly in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) organised this virtual gathering in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Department of Global Communications, UN Women and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs - Department of Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO). This year’s ADS was held virtually from 20 to 22 May 2020.

The Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General (USG) Bience Gawanas in her welcoming remarks, emphasised that more than ever, it was critical to have a debate on support channeled towards the African continent, vis-à-vis on-going efforts to better the continent. Similarly, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smaïl Chergui, drew on the imperative that action should be prioritised as opposed to waiting for the “for the crisis to worsen”. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres on his part, underscored that the “pandemic has exposed the fragility of our societies”, noting that it “is a global problem that demands a coordinated global response built on unity and solidarity”.

The dialogue brought together several stakeholders including members of civil society organisations, and regional mechanisms operating in the African continent to name a few. Reflecting on the opportunity at hand, the Chief Executive Officer of the African Union’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), Ibrahim Mayaki, outlined that “inclusive leadership” can be pursued to ensure an exchange of knowledge and expertise amongst generations in light of emerging challenges on the continent.

The SRSG to the African Union and Head of UNOAU, Hanna Tetteh, was one among discussants during the dialogue. In her remarks, SRSG Tetteh commended the African Union for its “its solidarity, collaboration and leadership in response to the pandemic”. She noted that the pandemic demonstrates the evident need on the African continent to strongly invest in human security and resilience. Such investments will also enhance state sovereignty, reduce conflict resulting from social and economic marginalisation and grievance, and advance the ambition for Silencing the Guns in Africa. SRSG Tetteh emphasised the need to leverage partnerships with non-state actors as well, such as the private sector, civil society and research institutions to ensure Africa is on track to Silence the Guns and achieve the SDGs and the Agenda 2063. Such partnerships could, for example, facilitate increased access to digital and virtual tools for education, employment, innovation, and motivate the promotion of peace instead of violence.

A full report of the 2020 ADS is expected to be issued soon. Meanwhile, USG Gawanas shared some insights on the discussion in a contribution to Africa Renewal magazine on 27 May.
Peace and Security in Africa in the context of COVID-19

‘How will COVID-19 Impact Peace and Security in Africa?’ was the theme of a virtual policy dialogue organised by the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) and Amani Africa on May 21. Closely monitoring and analysing the impact of COVID-19 in Africa from an early warning and conflict prevention angle is of paramount importance as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) to the African Union and Head of UNOAU, Hanna Tetteh, pointed out when speaking at this policy dialogue. She commended the solidarity, unity and leadership that the African Union has shown as the continent battles the spread of COVID-19 in the continent.

Also contributing to the dialogue were Ms. Michelle Ndiaye, Director of the Africa Peace and Security Programme at the IPSS and Head of the Tana Forum Secretariat, Ms. Comfort Ero, Africa Program Head at Crisis Group and Dr. Solomon Dersso, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

In the discussion, much reference was made to the linkage between the pandemic and its infringements on sustaining peace and security. Accordingly, Ms. Ndiaye underscored that the “crisis has revealed that access to basic services, better quality of life, and well-being should be at the heart of security policy because they are all the root causes of conflict on the continent”. Dr. Dersso added that there is need to take into account the unforeseen ways in which COVID-19 has already affected peace and security for instance, in the way "it exacerbates existing fragilities and how it may end up creating new fragilities and sources of insecurity and instability". Similarly, SRSG Tetteh noted that the pandemic has exposed gross inequalities in addition to providing fertile ground for violent extremist groups to operate.

Ms. Ero on her part, cautioned that it is "too early to make broad or affirmative statements', but also that, ‘there are opportunities' to be considered. She further stressed that ‘we should be careful not to link any uptick in violence to the pandemic".

SRSG Tetteh noted that there is an opportunity at hand to enhance multilateralism, international cooperation and cross-organisational partnerships to fight the pandemic. Some of the recommendations she put forward included ensuring that where elections are set to take place, all stakeholders participate in an inclusive manner so as to enhance the overall credibility of the electoral processes, while managing misinformation about COVID-19 without curtailing freedom of speech, and strengthening social inclusion. For Africa, SRSG Tetteh called on the need to boost resilience by tapping into the "largely unutilised potential of African women and youth" noting the various on-going initiatives women and youth have started on the ground in their countries to save lives against the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN issues a Policy Brief on Impact of COVID-19 on Africa

The spread of COVID-19 in Africa has taken its own course but the unpredictable nature of the pandemic necessitates for adequate planning and preparations for implementing preventive measures that can substantially reduce impacts on populations, economies and beyond. This policy brief on Africa provides an analysis of key sectors while also sharing recommendations to alleviate potential risks associated with COVID-19.
Progress in Controlling COVID-19 and its impact in Africa

In recent months, the African Union (AU) has been undertaking several measures to fight COVID-19 in Africa. These have included the appointment of Special Envoys to mobilise international support for Africa’s COVID-19 response namely, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Dr. Donald Kaberuka, Tidjane Thiam and Trevor Manuel in April. The Special Envoys are tasked with soliciting rapid and concrete support, as pledged by the G20, the European Union and international financial institutions, to enable African countries to respond swiftly to the public health emergency.

The African Union, particularly the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), hosts regular virtual meetings with partners to exchange information on measures taken to combat COVID-19 in Africa. In this regard, the AUPSC Chairperson for the month of May, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Professor Mafa. M. Sejanamane chaired a virtual session that provided updates on COVID-19 response in Africa on 19 May. Professor Sejanamane noted the importance of discussing the pandemic from the viewpoint of peace and security, and further added that there is a need for clear guidelines on "living with COVID". In a communiqué issued on the same, the participants advocated for building greater public awareness and implementing measures to tackle the pandemic, while ensuring that human rights are respected and protected. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) was urged to expedite the issuance of guidelines to facilitate the ease of lockdowns for use by African countries.

The SRSG to the African Union and Head of UNOAU, Hanna Tetteh, delivered a UN statement commending actions taken by African countries and the African Union in on-going efforts to curb the spread and related adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the statement of 19 May, SRSG Tetteh reiterated the appeal for a global ceasefire put forward by the UN Secretary-General, and echoed by the AUC Chairperson, noting that the UN is ready to support African countries to mitigate conflict in this difficult time. She further cited examples of UN peacekeeping and political missions' continued support currently under way in several African countries.

African Union Peace and Security Council on COVID-19 spread, control and implications

On 12 May, the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) issued a communiqué on its meeting on ‘the spread, control and implications of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Africa’, which was held on 6 May. In this meeting, the AUPSC underlined the important roles of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), African scientific research institutions and healthcare workers across the continent and urged relevant actors to redouble their efforts towards finding a cure and vaccine for COVID-19. Member States were also asked to enhance support to scientific efforts, to scale up testing, contact-tracing and treatment, and to follow the guidance issued by competent health institutions. The sharing of health-related intelligence and enhancement of cross-border cooperation was also recommended.

Additionally, the Council called on the UN Security Council (UNSC) to support its ongoing efforts noting the strategic partnership between the AU and the UN, in particular between the AUPSC and the UNSC in the area of peace and security.
Including women critical in the fight against COVID-19

An inaugural virtual meeting of Africa’s Women Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held on 7 May with an aim to enhance the leadership of women in continental COVID-19 response efforts. Among objectives outlined for the meeting were the need to take consider the various roles that women currently undertake in fighting the pandemic both in the home and their professional capacities in a context where such contributions go unseen. Another objective called for greater solidarity and collaboration to also ensure that women and girls are protected against emerging COVID-19 related issues such as gender-based violence and that women are included in decision making processes as well as activities to fight the pandemic.

This virtual meeting was jointly hosted by Ambassador Raychelle Omamo, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kenya and Dr. Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa. The UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed delivered remarks at the meeting in which she noted that despite the fact that women are many a times the hardest hit by consequences of the pandemic, in Africa, they continue to take leadership roles to strengthen post-recovery efforts by building resilience.

The SRSG to the African Union and Head of UNOAU, Hanna Tetteh, highlighted the need to adopt responses that are gender-sensitive. Noting the multiplicity of risks that COVID-19 poses on women and girls, she outlined some recommendations that enhance women’s inclusion and protection. These included supporting women-led organisations to engage in planning and making decisions in efforts to fight the pandemic and considering the participation of women in both short and long-term economic recovery plans while also ensuring that their capacities to play key roles in building peace and security are strengthened. Lastly, SRSG Tetteh underscored the need for protecting women and girls against gender-based violence in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs, Amira El Fadil, applauded the commitment of the African women foreign ministers and their efforts in the fight against the pandemic.

At global level, reports on cases related to gender-based violence against women and girls are soaring. COVID-19 has exacerbated an already dire situation. In light of this, the UN issued a policy brief in April that delves into how the lives of women and girls are changing in the face of the pandemic.

Source: The impact of COVID-19 on women (UN policy brief)
'Build Back Better', incoming UN General Assembly President asserts

This year, the UN turns 75 in September. The anniversary comes at a challenging time of COVID-19. The incoming president, Ambassador Volkan Bozkir of Turkey has commended the UN for steering the global fight against pandemic saying that 'build back better should be our motto'.

Join the conversation - take the UN 75 survey and make your voice heard here

A joint publication of the UN and AU, ‘She Stands for Peace: 20 Years, 20 Journeys’ features the stories of 20 African women and women organisations that have made outstanding contributions to peace and security on the continent. Download here

UN Policy Briefs

- The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition Available here
- COVID-19 and People on the Move Available here
- The Impact of COVID-19 on children Available here
- COVID-19 and human rights Available here
- The Impact of COVID-19 on older persons Available here
- COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health Available here
- A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19 Available here

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unoau-public-information@un.org
Connect:
https://unoau.unmissions.org