

# African Union Summit 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

**Outcome Document**

13 February 2024 | Ramada Hotel Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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## Acronyms list

APSP	Africa Peace and Security Programme
AU	African Union
AU-ACERWC	African Union Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AUC	African Union Commission
AU PAPS	African Union Political Affairs, Peace and Security
AYAP	African Youth Ambassador for Peace
CAMYOSFOP	Cameroon Youths & Students Forum for Peace
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CPAPS	Commission for Political Affairs, Peace and Security
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration
DDR-SSR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Security Sector Reform
ESTI	Education, Science, Technology & Innovation
IPSS	Institute for Peace and Security Studies
NHRI	National Human Rights Institutions
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Department
PCOs	Peace and Conflict Offices
RICs	Regional Information Centres
RECs/RMs	Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms
UK-FCDO	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNOAU	United Nations Office to the African Union
UNOHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
WANEP	West Africa Network of Peace Building
WBG	World Bank Group

# 01. Introduction

This outcome document presents:

- > A short overview of the joint AU UN WBG programme background, objectives, and partners that organized this AU Side Event
- > The AU Side Event objective, rationale and expected outcomes
- > The highlights of the AU side-event's panel discussions, including key outcomes and next steps
- > Links to all the communications associated with the event
- > List of participants

On the side-lines of the 37th AU Summit, the African Union Commission, an event was organised and hosted by the African Union, the World Bank Group, the United Nations, and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies. The event was entitled '[Ensuring the right to equitable and inclusive quality education to break and prevent cycles of violence in Africa](#)' on Tuesday, 13 February 2024, at Ramada Hotel, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This event was organized as part of a 3-year (2023-2025) UK FCDO supported joint AU UN WBG programme on strengthening the AU capacities mitigate and prevent conflict at national and regional levels, using DDR and human rights as entry points.

The joint programme support is part and parcel of [the fourth iteration of the joint African Union, United Nations, and World Bank Group cooperation framework on the implementation of Joint Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration \(DDR\) activities in Africa](#). This cooperation framework is part of an ongoing legacy initiative that was established over a decade ago in 2012.

Initially this joint AU WBG UN partnership focused on support to AU DDR capacities. Over time (2012 – 2024) the cooperation expanded to include support to AU in the areas of human rights, governance, DDR related activities, early warning and conflict prevention.

With education being the theme of the year for 2024, the meeting provided an opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between education and conflict prevention. The meeting was also an opportunity to redouble commitment to ensuring universal and equal access to inclusive and equitable quality of education and learning, to help interrupt and prevent cycles of violent conflict in Africa and to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2063, and the AU Silencing the Guns initiative.

The meeting brought together representatives from AU Political Affairs, Peace and Security (AU PAPS), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), African Youth Ambassadors for Peace, United Nations (UN) Agencies (UNOAU, UNESCO, OHCHR), the World Bank Group, ICRC, Think Tanks, AU Member States and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) along with stakeholders in the pertinent policy and practice arena. The Diplomatic Corps included representation from the United Kingdom, Japan, Finland, Norway, and Denmark.

The event enhanced awareness and understanding of the importance of the right to education and its linkages to strengthening resilience to help prevent and mitigate violent conflict by addressing the root causes of poverty and armed group formation. In addition, it provided an opportunity to discuss how to strengthen the right to education using a human rights-based approach.

## 02. Background

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right, essential for fostering development, peace, and resilience against conflicts.

In 2024, the African Union (AU) designated the year as the "Year of Education," reflecting a pivotal moment in re-evaluating and advancing the educational agenda across Africa.<sup>1</sup> This initiative is supported by a comprehensive review of key educational strategies, including the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.<sup>2</sup> These frameworks show the significant efforts made by African governments in enhancing educational policies and programmes over the past decade, despite challenges such as high out-of-school rates, especially in conflict-affected regions.

The commitment to improving educational access and quality is crucial in breaking cycles of poverty, inequality, and repeating patterns of armed groups formation and ensuing violent conflict. This also makes the comprehensive approach stronger and the link between education and conflict prevention by helping to advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on education by highlighting the important linkages between SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The linkage between education and peace was prominently featured at the African Union Summit Side Event, because the connection between education and peace and recurring conflict patterns warranted more attention. This is the reason why the AU summit side event was organized by the joint programme partners (AU, UN, WBG) with the view of exploring education's role in conflict prevention, response, and post-conflict reconstruction. Emerging research all point to the how education and human rights initiatives, especially those integrated into Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) processes, reduce the likelihood of relapse into conflict and promote non-violent societal responses.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, less children in school, is tantamount to more risk of children/youth being recruited by armed groups.

The right to education, as enshrined in numerous international human rights treaties, offers a robust legal backbone that aids African states in fulfilling their educational mandates. This global acknowledgement establishes a foundation upon which nations can ensure access to inclusive and equitable quality education, thereby empowering youth and fostering resilience against conflicts. However, over 500 million children in Africa remain out of school, and recent statistics show that despite improvements, substantial gaps in educational attainment and access remain, with millions of children still not receiving basic education.<sup>4</sup>

The AU faces critical questions on how to promote resilience and prevent conflicts that threaten educational and developmental gains, and what role can education play together with other prevention initiatives to help break prevent violent conflicts. At a policy and practical level, there is a push to integrate educational programmes with peacebuilding and prevention-focused initiatives. To address these questions, the AU, along with partners, is working on various initiatives to improve educational resilience. These efforts include mainstreaming human rights in conflict prevention, enhancing access to education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and fostering regional and continental strategies to address and prevent risks associated with poverty and repeating patterns of armed group formation and violent conflict.<sup>5</sup> To succeed, this approach requires a collaborative effort among global, regional, and national partners to

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<sup>1</sup> "UNICEF Joins Forces with Africa Union to Prioritize Education in 2024." (2024, February 26), *UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa*, [www.unicef.org/esa/stories/unicef-joins-forces-africa-union-prioritize-education-2024](http://www.unicef.org/esa/stories/unicef-joins-forces-africa-union-prioritize-education-2024)

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO and the Pre-launch of the African Union's Theme for 2024. (2024, February 20), *UNESCO*, [www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-pre-launch-african-unions-theme-2024](http://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-pre-launch-african-unions-theme-2024)

<sup>3</sup> Mueller, H., and Techasunthornwat, C., (2020, October). "Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Background Paper on Conflict and Poverty." *worldbank.org*, D74 I32, World Bank, [documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/519741603804458786/pdf/Conflict-and-Poverty.pdf#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fdocuments1.worldbank.org%2Fcurated%2Fen%2F519741603804458786%2Fpdf%2FConflict](https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/519741603804458786/pdf/Conflict-and-Poverty.pdf#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fdocuments1.worldbank.org%2Fcurated%2Fen%2F519741603804458786%2Fpdf%2FConflict)

<sup>4</sup> "UNESCO and the Pre-launch of the African Union's Theme for 2024." (2024, February 20), *UNESCO*, [www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-pre-launch-african-unions-theme-2024](http://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-pre-launch-african-unions-theme-2024)

<sup>5</sup> "Press Releases Progress, Challenges, and Prospects of Africa's Development Form the Agenda of Ministers at the AU Summit." (2024, February 15), *African Union*, [au.int/en/pressreleases/20240215/progress-challenges-and-prospects-africas-development-form-agenda-ministers](http://au.int/en/pressreleases/20240215/progress-challenges-and-prospects-africas-development-form-agenda-ministers)

innovate and share knowledge and strategies effectively, thus ensuring that education remains a cornerstone of peace and development across the continent.

### 03. Objective and expected outcomes of the event

In line with “Education” being the theme for the AU during 2024, this side event provided the opportunity to emphasize the importance of this overall AU theme and link it to conflict prevention.

Specifically, the overall objective of the side event was to enhance awareness and understanding of the importance of the right to education and its linkages to strengthening resilience to help prevent and mitigate recurring patterns of violent conflict and armed group formation.

**This event showcased emerging results and learnings from the ongoing 3-year (2023-2025) UK FCDO-supported joint AU UN WBG programme on “Strengthening Operational Linkages between Early Warning and Conflict Response”,** using DDR and human rights as initial entry points.

The side event was an opportunity to discuss the important linkages between education and broader conflict prevention and development priorities in Africa.

The event focused on exploring opportunities to strengthen the preventative value of the right to education through a human rights approach.

**Using education as a point of departure, the discussions examined how violent conflict impacts education — by building contextual resilience to risks and vice versa.** This side event was particularly timely as ensuring the right to equitable and inclusive quality education is fundamental to breaking and preventing cycles of violence in Africa, aligning closely with the event's overarching theme.

#### Expected outcomes

- i. To promote a shared understanding of education as a source of resilience to violent conflict risks and part and parcel of prevention efforts.
- ii. To develop concrete recommendations to influence policy about the linkage between access to education and violent conflicts.
- iii. To provide valuable insights for improvements in data collection, reporting, and capacity-building and training practices related to the right to education.
- iv. To develop summary recommendations to the attention of select AU end-users in CPAPS engaged in conflict prevention and response.

**The outcomes of this AU summit side event are expected to inform the concrete next steps of the ongoing Joint UK-FCDO-funded African Union, United Nations, and World Bank Partnership (2023 - 2025)** to optimise AU CPAPS support to conflict management and conflict prevention actions at national and regional levels by using a human rights approach to conflict prevention.

## 04. Snapshot of the Joint AU UN WBG Programme (2023 – 2025)

### AU UN WBG Joint Programme Objective

The UK FCDO is funding a joint three-year (2023-2025) AU, UN, WBG support programme that aims to:

*>> increase the number and effectiveness of AU CPAPS conflict management and prevention actions in support of requests by member states and regional partners (RECs, PSOs, CSO/NHRI networks), using Human Rights, and Governance, and reintegration related activities as thematic entry points.*

### Joint Programme beneficiaries include:

#### CPAPS

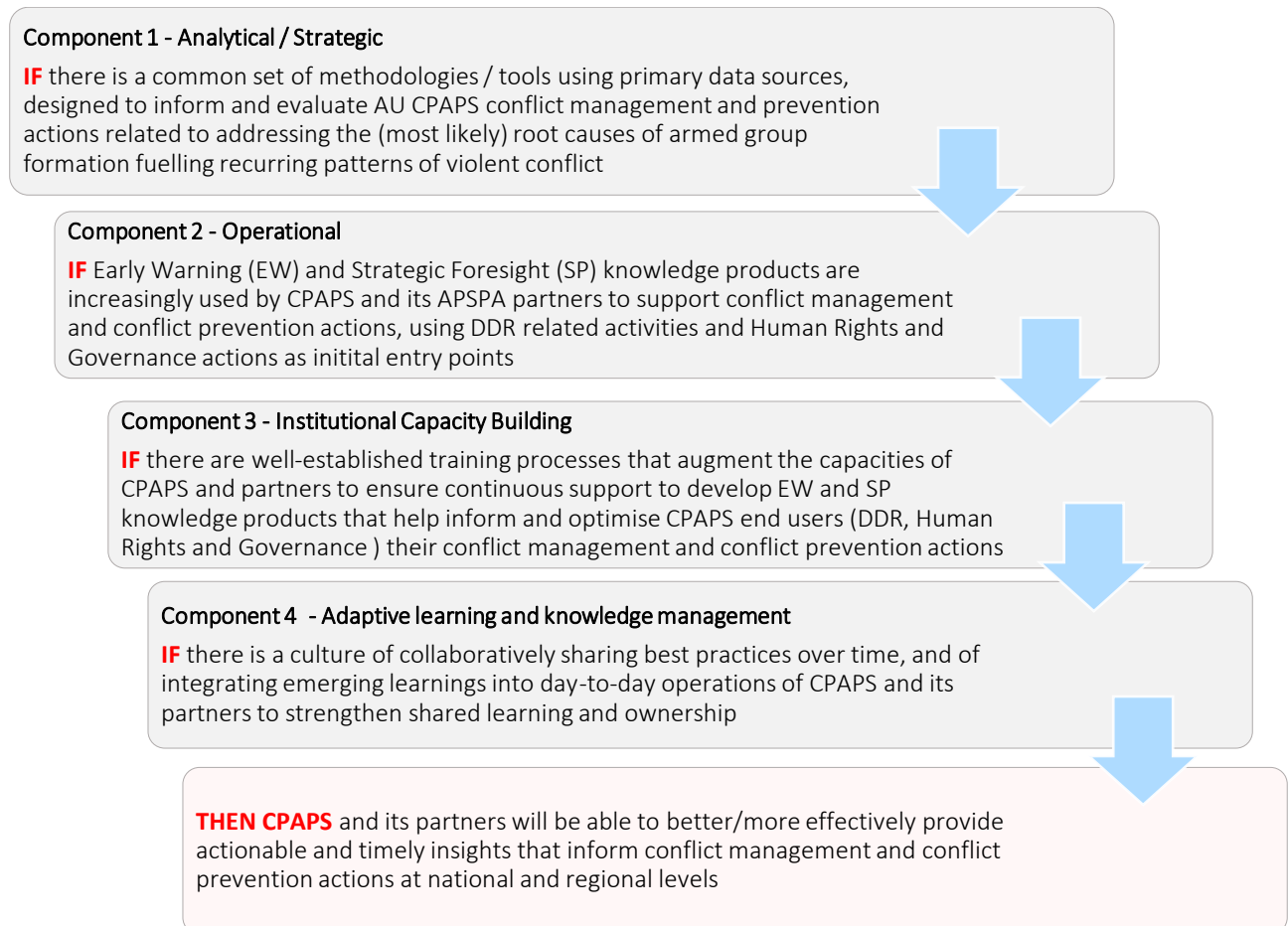
- Human Rights and Governance Division
- DDR/SSR Division
- Regional Desks
- Situation Room

#### Other

- CSO networks
- National Human Rights Commissions

## Snapshot of Joint Programme Components and Theory of Change

Below is an overview of the four components of the joint programme and the theory of change in support of the overall programme objective outlined above.



## Joint Programme Partners

- AU Department for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS) – Human Rights and Governance divisions, DDR division, Regional Desks, Situation Room (others may be added on a needs basis)
- The World Bank Group (WBG)
- UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),
- UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
- Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS)
- UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPO)
- United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU)

# all joint programme partners are together with the AU members of the largest UN working group on DDR related activities: [the Integrated working group on DDR standards](#).

Other partners include select training Centres of Excellence and research institutions, [the Net4Peace initiative](#), and like-minded partners and donors that enhance the catalytic effect of the programme results.



## 05. Event Format

The diverse group of speakers and panellists included representatives from the AU leadership, AU Youth Ambassadors, regional and national civil society networks, African research and training centres, the United Nations, and the World Bank Group. They discussed current research and critical barriers and shared success stories from around the continent and globally to identify practical and relevant insights to promote inclusive education entry points for different continental, regional, and local actors that are engaged in broader development and conflict response and prevention initiatives across the continent.

The meeting brought together representatives from AU Political Affairs, Peace and Security (AU PAPS), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), African Youth Ambassadors for Peace, United Nations (UN) Agencies (UNOAU, UNESCO, OHCHR), the World Bank Group, ICRC, Think Tanks, AU Member States and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), along with stakeholders in the pertinent policy and practice arena. The diplomatic corps included representation from the United Kingdom, Japan, Denmark, Germany, Finland and Norway.

The audience had an opportunity to share their reactions, questions, and ideas for better inclusion of the right to education in the work of the AU and partners related to conflict prevention through the panel discussions and Q&A sessions.

This side-event comprised three panels:

**Panel 1** - An overview of AU, regional, and international frameworks and goals related to the right to education goals, and how they relate to AU Silencing the Guns, Agenda 2063, and global frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda.

**Panel 2** – A presentation of what AU Member States can do to help strengthen resilience to prevent and mitigate conflict risks and the added value of prioritising the achievement of education outcomes.

**Panel 3** – The identification of key recommendations and best practices that can inform the joint AU UN WB partnership to tailor support to regional actors and member states in the field of prevention and response.

## 06. Key Highlights

### Opening ceremony speakers

**Participants were welcomed by Mrs. Patience Zanelie Chiradza, the Director of Governance and Conflict Prevention in CPAPs.** In her welcome remarks, she reiterated the important linkages between the right to education and the repeating cycles of violence in Africa. She highlighted the significance of the event at a critical juncture, aligning with the AU Theme of the Year 2024. Ms. Chiradza stressed, *“Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for fostering development, peace, and progress.”*

**Remarks by Ambassador Bankole Adeoyo, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS).** The Commissioner welcomed participants on behalf of the chairperson of the AUC. In his keynote speech, underscored the critical importance of prioritising and investing in peace education. He asserted that education is key to breaking the silence of violence in Africa, stating, *“Education will change the face of the continent, offering unlimited opportunities, especially for the girl child.”* The Commissioner emphasised that access to quality education equips individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities, engage in constructive dialogue, and seek non-violent solutions to conflicts. He noted that education is a changing powerful tool and key to breaking cycles of violence in Africa. He hoped youths involved in conflicts on the continent should have been part of the meeting. He also stated that it is important to invest in peace education to change the face of the continent to achieve the Africa we Want. Peace education is vital to stability, and as such, the right to education is a multi-dimensional process.

**Remarks by HE, Prof. Mohammed Belhocine Commissioner for Education, Science, Innovation and Technology.** The Commissioner noted that education is a human rights issue, and states are duty bearers. Parents and communities also have a lot to do as they are contributing to the running of schools. The right to education cannot be guaranteed without government investments that provide opportunities for comprehensive education. Education is pivotal to the achievement of the continental blueprint, Agenda 2063. Unfortunately, in Africa, over 500 million kids are not attending schools, driving them to drugs and involvement in conflicts. To drive the education agenda, the AU created the Pan African University with five institutes that excelling very well. Equally, recently the AU also launched a continental strategic road map on education with an emphasis on peace education. To achieve this agenda, there is need for collaboration by governments as well as the use of social networks in advancing education. It is also key to train teachers on peace education, as investing in education will greatly contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2063.

**Remarks by Ms. Lettie Longwe Interim Director of Africa Peace and Security Programme at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS).** Ms. Lettie recalled the importance of education, especially inclusive education, to break cycles of violence. Bringing everyone together for this kind of discussion helps us to advance not only the theme for the year but the education revolution in general. The right to education will help prevent and mitigate violence, especially using the human rights-based approach. She ended by appreciating the partners and co-organizers of the event and expressed hope for a sustained momentum in 2024.

**Remarks by Marcel Clement Akpovo, Office of the High Commission for Human Rights for East Africa Liaison Office to the AU.** Mr. Akpovo started by thanking the various partners in the organization of this event. He re-emphasized the importance of the right to education as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He noted that over 100 countries have enshrined this right in their constitutions. The connection to the right to education and conflict is key. Therefore, access to quality education helps direct the empowerment of young people and resilience to conflict. Unfortunately, many children in Africa are still not receiving basic education, as testified by the 98% of children in sub-Saharan Africa. It is critical to ensure that education is inclusive, thus promoting a sense of belonging, tolerance, changing mentalities in the society, as opined by the OHCHR. Education can help to prevent violations and conflicts, thus the fulfilment of the right to education is pivotal to preventing cycles of conflicts.

**Remarks by Mr. Gerald Mitchell, Deputy Head of Office, UN Office to the Africa Union.** Mr. Mitchell declared that education can prevent conflict and can highly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and Silencing the Guns in Africa. As such, it is important to consider three key elements when advocating for peace education.

1. Recognition of the peace, security and development nexus and recognizing the centrality of education to conflict prevention and sustainable development.
2. Linked to the nexus is the need to focus on comprehensive approaches, in which education is vital to DDR initiatives in curbing the enrolment of youth and children in armed groups.
3. The need for inclusivity with the involvement of youth in decision-making and implementation of programmes and the development of strategies relevant to their needs.

**Remarks by Mr. Daniel Owen, Lead Social Development Specialists, Eastern and Southern Africa, World Bank.** Mr. Owen started by appreciating the AU for the current theme, indicating that both the World Bank and the AU have been working in this domain since 2013. The relevance and quality of education are primordial in dissuading young people from conflicts. He also noted that Early Warning can be very key in mitigating conflicts and highlighted the important role that Early Warning mechanisms and inclusive data sets (gender and marginalised groups) have in helping design prevention and mitigation responses to violent conflict. The World Bank/AU partnership has also been involved in capacity building and development of guidance notes on conflict prevention using the Human Rights Based Approach as well as the use of data in informing policy on education on the continent.

### Closing session

**The event concluded with the identification of a series of recommendations targeting the AU and its partners** to help achieve the Africa we want, and break the repeated cycles of armed group formation, ensuing violence, and unlock the development and peace potential of African citizens. These included the need to invest more in agribusiness development, poverty alleviation, and the development of traditional educational systems. The importance of sharing success stories about peace education; strengthening early warning systems; strengthening partnerships with regional, national and local actors to address the root causes of violent conflict, promoting inter-community dialogue, and reviewing policies in line with peace education in Africa were emphasised.

## Opening Session Highlights

**Education as a Pillar for Conflict Prevention and Human Rights.** Education plays a crucial role in conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and the promotion of human rights.

- Education is outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with wide constitutional recognition.
- Education's integral role in preventing conflict and supporting post-conflict reconstruction can be seen particularly through the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) processes.
- Education decreases the likelihood of conflict by challenging ideologies of hate, enabling a human rights-based approach, as well as preventing recruitment into armed groups.

**Quality and Inclusivity in Education.** Ensuring the quality and inclusivity of education is essential for breaking cycles of violence and fostering long-term peace.

- It is necessary to maintain high-quality, relevant education that actively dissuades youth from conflict, with the support of early warning systems.
- Government investment and community involvement are vital to providing comprehensive, inclusive educational opportunities.
- Equitable access to education is necessary, particularly emphasising support for vulnerable groups such as displaced persons and minorities.

**Education's Role in Sustainable Development and Peace.** Education is a key driver for achieving sustainable development goals and promoting peace and security.

- Education is a driving force behind achieving the SDGs and Silencing the Guns in Africa by fostering peace, security, and preventing youth involvement in armed groups.
- Peace education should be integrated into education curricula to promote societal stability and tolerance.
- Highlights the significance of education in empowering youth, building societal resilience, and promoting gender equality.

**Strategic and Cooperative Efforts for Educational Enhancement.** Strategic investments and international cooperation are essential to enhance the quality and impact of education.

- Strategic investments in educational infrastructure and quality to meet the goals of Agenda 2063 should be sacrosanct.
- International cooperation and partnerships, such as those between the World Bank and the AU, in enhancing educational impacts are crucial for Agenda 2063.

- New initiatives, like the emergency education initiative and the Pan African University, in fostering a collaborative, pan-African educational environment play a key role and hold significant importance at the intersection of education, peace, and security.

**Comprehensive Approaches to Education and Conflict Resolution.** A holistic educational approach is necessary to effectively link education with other themes that can strengthen resilience to risks and improve conflict prevention and sustainable development outcomes.

- A Comprehensive, holistic approach is required to link education with conflict prevention and sustainable peace.
- Inclusivity in decision-making and programme implementation, particularly for youth and children, and especially the girl child is important.
- Multifaceted role of education in reducing recruitment into armed groups and enhancing early conflict prevention efforts should not be taken for granted.

## **Session 01. The Right to Education – An Overview of International and Regional International Treaties**

**Framing the Debate:** An overview of the education compliance landscape and its relationship to relevant goals related to Silencing the Guns, Agenda 2063, by **Mr. Ayelaw Asseffa, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (AU-ACERWC)**.

Mr. Asseffa presentation focused on the international and regional instruments on the right to education. He noted that the right to education is the most protected right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Several soft laws have been developed to promote this right, including SDG 4, Silencing the Guns, and Aspirations 2 and 3 of Agenda 2063. The right to education is a substantive and procedural right, as articulated by Article 11 of the African Children’s Charter, that outline this right in line with:

1. Availability of education
2. Accessibility to education
3. Acceptability of education
4. Adaptability of education

**Legal Frameworks and International Commitments.** The session discussed the important role of international and regional legal frameworks in supporting agendas across Africa, focusing on:

- The right to education is both a substantive and procedural entitlement.
- Universal and Regional Treaties emphasise the global consensus on the fundamental right to education, as highlighted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Children’s Charter.
- Legislative and judicial actions related to the need for countries are required to establish and enforce laws that facilitate access to quality education in alignment with commitments like SDG 4 and Agenda 2063.

**Barriers to Educational Access and Quality.** Despite robust frameworks, various obstacles hinder effective access to and the quality of education, particularly in regions facing socio-economic challenges and conflicts.

- Physical and Economic Barriers include issues such as school remoteness, inadequate transportation, and insufficient financial support.
- Vulnerability and Exclusion deal with discrimination and the exclusion of vulnerable groups like children with disabilities, highlighting the necessity for inclusive education policies.
- Conflict and Education examines how conflicts impact educational facilities and access, advocating for the protection and non-militarisation of educational spaces.

**Education as a Tool for Development and Peace.** Explores how education serves as a foundation for broader social stability, economic growth, and the prevention of violence and extremism.

- Linkages to Employment and Economic Stability detail how education enhances employability and contributes to economic stability, crucial for deterring involvement in violent activities.
- The role of education in Peacebuilding underscores its capacity to foster resilience against extremism through promoting understanding and tolerance.
- Policy and Community Engagements emphasise the importance of integrating community efforts into educational policy to create safe and inclusive environments.

**Dr Rita Bissoonauth, Director of UNESCO, Addis Liaison Office to AU and UNECA.** Dr Bissoonauth started her intervention by recalling the importance of SDG 4 on education. She reiterated UNESCO's mission of promoting the right to education by working with UNHCHR and other stakeholders, including the youth, focusing on the SDG 4.

**Mrs. Sophia Ashipala, Head of Education Division, Department of Education, Science, and Innovation at the AUC.** Mrs. Ashipala once more reflected on the linkages between SDG 4 and the right to education, which is key to the 2024 AU theme of the year. Looking at existing triggers of the theme of the year, there is still a huge number of children out of school. The theme is therefore aimed at reminding member states that education is a right to every African child. It should be recalled that low enrolment is not only to children in conflicts, as many other countries without conflicts still have high levels of children out of school, sometimes because of the accessibility to schools. Equally, the quality education offered is important. As such, there is much to do in improving on the right to school thus, keeping the momentum, especially by bringing everybody on board on promoting the right to education.

**Mrs. Isabella Moses Wariba, Child Protection Advisor, PAPS.** According to Mrs. Wariba, mainstreaming child protection in APSA with a focus on linking the rights to education in conflict and post conflict situation is key. The right to education can be used in fully participating in the development of communities thus playing a major role in the prevention of conflicts. Attacks in school facilities is a great violation of the right to education and by extension multiply other violations of children in conflicts. Member states should be able to ensure that the right to education is respected during conflict. Based on this, the concept of safe schools' declaration is very important in promoting the right to education as it provide guidance on making sure that schools are not militarize during conflicts. During post conflicts, it's important to maintain education during DRR and peacebuilding processes.

Mrs Wariba, concluded with the following reflections to the right to education.

1. Need for inclusive education.
2. Safety to schools.
3. Peace and conflict sensitive education.
4. Accountability and public responsibility to education.

**Mrs. Nirina Kiplagat, UNDP Governance and Peacebuilding Coordinator, OIC, Regional Peacebuilding Advisor.** Mrs. Nirina focused her presentation on terrorism and Violent Extremism as UNDP invest heavily on research in violent extremism. On this, UNDP has undertaken a study on the triggers of violent extremism in the continent. One of the findings has to do with access to education including the recruitment of young people in violent extremism. The study indicate that religious education contributes highly to resilience to violent extremism. The study sampled Nigeria and Tanzania that have been at the forefront of inclusive entrepreneurship education in countering violent extremism.



## **Session 02.** What are the key areas that Member States need to focus on to improve prevention and build resilience to conflict risks

This session focused on the key areas, including education, that Member States need to focus on to build resilience to contextual and cross-broader risks that fuel and trigger recurring patterns of violent conflict.

**Lina Imran, DDR/SSR officer from the PAPS,** set the ball rolling for this session with a focus on DDR. Looking at the cycle of conflicts and violent extremism groups, she questioned why individuals join these groups. Lack of education and jobs are major reasons for individuals joining these groups. It is for this reason that it's important to have DDR as a key element of the education curricula, as this could have long-term implications on the promotion of peace and security.

**Enhancing DDR and National Development Integration.** Education plays a critical role in Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) processes by providing a stable foundation for former combatants and at-risk youths. It is essential for increasing the effectiveness of peace support operations and supporting long-term resilience in conflict-affected societies.

- Education in DDR processes emphasises the importance of integrating educational programs into DDR strategies to aid the social reintegration of combatants and prevent recurring patterns of violent conflict by helping to address the root causes of armed group formation, including the recruitment of children and youth.
- Conflicts often lead to the destruction or closure of schools, as well as the targeting of students, teachers, and education personnel. This disrupts and erodes educational outcomes, with a high risk of severe long-term consequences.
- Collaboration with National Development objectives stresses the need to align DDR programs with national educational and employment initiatives to ensure sustainable development.

**Addressing Educational Barriers in Conflict Zones.** In regions affected by conflict, several factors significantly hinder the right to education, necessitating focused interventions to restore and maintain access to educational facilities.

- Security and Stability Challenges highlight the impact of security issues like violent extremism and political instability on educational access, particularly in West Africa.
- Economic and Infrastructural Barriers demonstrate how economic hardships and inadequate infrastructure exacerbate educational disruptions, leading to high dropout rates.

**Mr. Ansoumane Samassy Souare, Programme Officer, Conflict Prevention, Early Warning, Peace Building Centre, WANEP**

Mr. Ansoumane started his presentation with a brief overview of the current conflict context of West Africa that seriously affects the right to education, hence leading to school dropouts in the region. For the past 25 years, WANEP has been involved in early warning especially in data collection. The AU needs to take this seriously in its continental Early Warning System. His intervention also included the following points:

1. AU should be able to invest in Agric business development, thereby fighting against poverty.
2. Modernize traditional educational system.
3. It is important using success stories to talk about the benefit of education.
4. There is need to strengthen the Early Warning system, inter-community dialogue, and other measures to promote the right to education.

**Mr. Achaleke Christian, AU Africa Youth Ambassador for Peace.** Mr Achaleke provided an overview of the situation of conflict affected regions in Cameroon and shared his experience working on the right to education especially in the Far North Region of Cameroon where he has been involved in promoting inclusive education especially for children in conflict communities. He noted that sport and recreational activities have been used in articulating issues on peace education and boosting the morals of children from traumatic situations. Through his education programme, he has been able to set up a school with an enrolment of 120 kids, providing opportunities to children from conflicts areas. Other issues raised by him included:

**Community Engagement and Policy Support.** For education to effectively contribute to peacebuilding, community involvement and robust policy frameworks are crucial. This involves enhancing the capacity of local institutions and integrating educational objectives into broader peace and security strategies:

- Strengthening Local Educational Systems advocates for the modernisation of traditional educational systems and enhancing community involvement in educational planning.
- Policy Development for Education and Peace encourages the development of policies that support educational access and quality, integrate peace education, and promote safe learning environments even in conflict settings.

**Mr. Mame Ibrahim Tounkara, Deputy Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the African Union.** Mr. Tounkara reflected on the effects of armed conflicts on the right to education. The effects of these conflicts are usually long-term as even at the end of these conflicts, parents are still not very sure of their children going to school for fear of being recruited into armed conflict. Other issues raised by him included:

1. The right to education and humanitarian law during conflicts should be respected.
2. Necessary disposition should be taken to guarantee the right to education during armed conflict.
3. Success stories are key to promoting the right to education.
4. There is a need to carefully consider what drives children to violent extremism.

**Mr. Ngalim Eugene Nyuydine, Executive Director of the Cameroon Youths and Students Forum for Peace (CAMYOSFOP)**, Mr Ngalim's presentation was focused on his personal experiences on piloting peace education in Cameroon for over 23 years now. His work on peace education started with the campaign against war toys, firecrackers, and violent films, and later extended to cover the issue of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Through the program:

1. 30 peace clubs have been created in secondary schools.
2. By 2004, the sales of war toys and firecrackers had reduced in Cameroon markets.
3. The government started a censorship of the content of television and radio programmes.
4. A National Communication Council was created to monitor the quality of programmes projected and published by the media.
5. In 2022, a course on the Diplomacy of Arms Control, Non-Proliferation, and Disarmament (DACPD) was initiated in partnership with RECSA, UNREC, UNODA, AU ECOSOCC and hosted by the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC).

Other issues raised by Mr. Ngalim included:

- There is a need for AU to consider diversifying peace education through various domains on peace.
- The AU should review the various policies in place in line with peace education in Africa to take into consideration the current context.
- A curriculum of peace education should be developed and implemented in key pilot schools on the continent.

## 07. Recommendations

### Policy Advocacy

- **Advocacy for Inclusive Education Policies.** Advocacy efforts are necessary to push for policy changes that ensure educational systems are inclusive, especially for children with disabilities, those affected by child marriage, and other marginalised groups, and to promote the integration of educational policies into peacebuilding and national development strategies.
- **Educational relationship with repeating cycles of violence and armed group formation.** The focus is on strengthening the legal and policy frameworks essential for ensuring equitable and inclusive education, which is crucial for preventing violence and recruitment of youth and children in armed groups, through improved education and employment opportunities for youth.
- **Legal Frameworks and Policy Support.** Robust legal and policy frameworks are important to ensure the effective implementation of educational agendas in conflict-affected areas. This includes adherence to international treaties and the development of regional guidelines that support the integration of education with peacebuilding initiatives, especially in DDR processes.
- **Awareness and Development of Legal and Normative Frameworks.** Focuses on strengthening legal protections for educational facilities and developing frameworks to hold perpetrators accountable. This recommendation aims to safeguard educational environments, ensuring that education can continue unhindered in conflict and post-conflict settings.
- **Development of a Continental Strategy on the Education, Peace, and Security Nexus.** Emphasises the need for a holistic approach that integrates education within broader peace and security policies to tackle the root causes of conflicts. This strategy is intended to coordinate actions across African Union member states to enhance the role of education in conflict prevention.

### Programmatic

Partner programmes need to implement the right to education more effectively as part of a holistic approach to addressing the root causes of poverty, armed group formation, and drivers of violent conflict. This includes factoring in the varying contextual priorities and focusing on inclusivity and accessibility, especially in conflict-affected areas.

- **Integration of Education in DDR Processes.** Programmes that incorporate education within DDR strategies to better integrate former combatants and children affected by conflicts into society, but also to prevent future recruitment of youth and children, as highlighted by the need for education to be a part of these processes.
- **Curricula Comprise Peace Education and Conflict Resolution.** Specific programmes discussed included the development of curricula that incorporate peace education and conflict resolution aimed at fostering long-term stability and resilience among children and youth in affected regions.

- **Formal Education and Vocational Training.** Programmatic recommendations included the need for educational interventions that focus on both formal education and vocational training to improve livelihood opportunities and reduce the risk of conflict re-engagement.
- **Engagement with the Public and Private Sectors:** Building alliances with both public and private sector entities to create pathways to sustainable employment for youth through internships, apprenticeships, and job placement programs, allows trained youth to gain practical experience and access job opportunities in diverse sectors of the economy. It is important to align vocational training programs with the needs of the labour market to ensure that youth are equipped with the skills and knowledge demanded by employers.
- **Safe Schools and Community Engagement Programmes.** Initiatives like the Safe Schools Declaration and community engagement efforts that ensure schools are zones of peace and that education continues during and after conflicts. Like in the case in Cameroon, where the youth-led organisation Local Youth Corner Cameroon is currently running the Salaam School, which provides a safe space for free schooling for children affected by the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North Region.
- **Incentivising school attendance in emergency situations:** Initiatives like the School Feeding Program and recreational activities in school which help respond to some of the challenges which affect school attendance should be encouraged. Improved health and nutrition facilitated by school meals enable school-aged children to enhance their learning and performance, thereby expanding their educational prospects.
- **Support for Effective Education Investments.** A call for tailored educational programmes that ensure inclusivity and equity, adapted to the specific needs of member states. These programmes aim to provide quality education that reaches all segments of the population, preventing exclusion and reducing conflict triggers.
- **Partnership with Civil Society for Educational Advocacy.** Encourages collaboration with civil society organisations to promote educational reforms and integration of peace education into school curricula is encouraged. These partnerships are expected to raise awareness and drive community support for educational initiatives that contribute to peace and security.
- **Inclusion of youth and marginalised groups.** There is a need for more systematic inclusion of civil society groups that include the voices of marginalised voices of youth and women in the design and development of holistic solutions addressing the root causes of poverty, and repeating patterns of armed group formation and violent conflict.

## Research

Research plays a critical role in understanding the impacts of education policies and programmes, examining how education can be a preventative tool against violence, and exploring the relationship between educational access and employment opportunities.

- **Study on Education's Role in Conflict Prevention:** discussions focused on how educational access and quality impact community resilience and prevent violent extremism. Research findings were highlighted to support the creation of policies and programmes that employ education as a tool for

de-escalation and prevention of violence, including those related to DDR processes.

- **Impact Studies on Education and Employment:** To investigate how access to quality education leads to better employment opportunities and reduces the risk of involvement in violent activities.
- **Evaluations of Educational Barriers in Conflict Zones:** This focuses on identifying the critical barriers to education in conflict zones, including safety concerns and lack of infrastructure, which hinder educational access and quality.
- **Identifying Gaps in Data and Collaboration with Think Tanks:** Highlighting the need for improved data collection and analysis to better understand education's impact on peace and security. This research will help in understanding the impact of educational programs and policies on peace and security, providing evidence-based recommendations for future actions.
- **Knowledge-Sharing for Policy Support:** Recommend the establishment of a community for sharing knowledge and best practices to aid in the implementation of educational policies. This community will facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, enhancing the capacity of member states to implement effective educational initiatives.

## 08. Conclusion

The meeting ended with closing remarks by Ambassador William Awinador, Special Advisor to the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS).

The African Union Summit Side Event focused on enhancing awareness of the crucial role of education in conflict prevention and mitigation in Africa.

The event foregrounds the need to strengthen cooperation, innovation, and knowledge sharing among national and regional partners engaged in addressing the different root causes of poverty and recurring patterns of armed group formation and violent conflict.

Alongside the important role of education, an important caveat was highlighted: for conflict prevention and development to be successful, it is predicated on the adoption of a holistic approach that addresses all the root causes of poverty, and repeating cycles of armed groups formation and violent conflict. This holistic approach should be an integral part of the cornerstone of conflict prevention, peace, and development efforts across the continent.

The challenge remains that despite recognition by all partners around the need for stronger cooperation and a holistic approach, there are limited incentives to effectively work together across our organisational and thematic silos.

The joint UK-FCDO funded AU UN WBG programme, with its strong focus on partnership and knowledge sharing, presents an opportunity to innovate, test, and iterate holistic approaches that address root causes of poverty and repeating patterns of armed group formation and violent conflict.

## 09. Next Steps

Going forward, the joint program partners will integrate the recommendations from the event as follows:

### >> Step 1. Partnership (rolling basis)

The joint programme will strive to more effectively include the participation of a wider group of partners in the design and implementation of activities. This will include engaging more effectively with the AU youth envoys and other relevant AU and CSO initiatives working with youth and other marginalised groups (viz. AU gender, Net4Peace, and Youth4Peace).

### >> Step 2. Communication (June 2024)

The publication of a policy research brief illustrating the significance of building resilience to help address drivers of poverty and repeating cycles of armed group formation and violent conflict. The policy brief will detail effective ways to integrate education into conflict prevention strategies using DDR and human rights as thematic entry points. The brief will provide actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers on using education as a tool for peace.

### >> Step 3. Advocacy (rolling basis)

A policy brief will be developed by June 2024 and used to inform targeted advocacy and dialogue initiatives to engage key partners, the AU, UN, WBG, CSOs, including youth representatives, and like-minded partners in integrating the recommendation of the policy research.

### >> Step 4. Operational support (July – Sept 2024). Development and testing of early warning and strategic foresight knowledge products

Design early warning and strategic foresight products to inform AU PAPS conflict management and conflict prevention actions at national and regional levels using human rights and DDR as initial thematic entry points.

### >> Step 5. Capacity Building (May 2024 – June 2025)

Targeted trainings tailored to the needs of CPAPS end-users will be designed and implemented in collaboration with IPSS and NET4PEACE partners, and other African Training Centres of Excellence. The trainings will focus on the specific needs of CPAPS end-users engaged in supporting conflict prevention actions in target member state and regional contexts, using DDR and Human Rights as entry points. Target end-users include, but are not limited to, Regional Desks, Situation Room, AU DDR/SSR, Human Rights and Governance Divisions, Civil Society Networks, and National Human Rights Institutions.

### >> Step 6. Lessons learned research (rolling basis). Adaptive learning and knowledge management

Learning events showcasing lessons will be conducted on a quarterly basis, and the results will be published with inputs from all partners that reflect the important learnings generated from the piloting of these early warning and strategic foresight knowledge products and associated end-user training packages that will be used to optimise support going forward. This is an important component of the joint programme that aims to augment the value add and ownership of the results.



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## Annexes

### Annex 1. Communications around the event

[AU press release](#)

AU's X post:

[https://x.com/AUC\\_PAPS/status/1757312793626181853?s=20](https://x.com/AUC_PAPS/status/1757312793626181853?s=20)

[https://x.com/auc\\_paps/status/1757725421502595491?s=48&t=v2IB2ezbfAsCWrpqMLSU3w](https://x.com/auc_paps/status/1757725421502595491?s=48&t=v2IB2ezbfAsCWrpqMLSU3w)

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