

**Statement of the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts on the
International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers**

Addis Ababa, 12 February 2024 - On the International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers, the Co-Chairs of the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts (AP-CAAC), H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union Commission and H.E. Ambassador Jainaba Jagne, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of The Gambia to the African Union, strongly condemn the recruitment and use of children in conflicts. They encourage Member States to take systematic and targeted steps to protect children against violations of all their rights, especially the recruitment and use of boys and girls in conflict situations. They further remind partners at global, regional and national levels of the need to accelerate efforts and increase resources for the protection of children, including against recruitment and use in conflicts.

In addition, they call on Member States to intensify efforts to secure children's release at every opportunity, with children given priority in the demobilisation process. And that Member States and partners should demonstrate a clear commitment to children in conflict situations by providing adequate resources for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR),

Children in situations of conflict, by virtue of their age and evolving capacities, are victims. Even when they have been used to commit or witness offences in conflict, their vulnerability to instrumentalisation, manipulation and exploitation mitigates their guilt as perpetrators. The Co-chairs, therefore reiterate that their involvement should, not be used as a basis for punitive measures. Accordingly, the response towards children associated with armed forces or armed groups must first seek to protect and refer them to appropriate civilian authorities for support and reintegration.

"Irrespective of the actual or perceived nature of their involvement, children should be accorded due process guarantees within a child-friendly justice framework and following international juvenile justice principles. Children should not be prosecuted solely for their mere association with an armed group," the Co-Chairs added.

The Co-chairs further remind that this day provides an opportunity to raise awareness against the recruitment and use of children either directly or indirectly by all parties to conflict, reflect on the progress achieved in addressing this enormous violation and carve a way forward toward zero recruitment and use of children in conflicts.

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