PRESS RELEASE

THE COMMITTEE RELEASES ITS FIRST COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF CONFLICTS AND CRISIS ON CHILDREN IN AFRICA

Banjul, 28 October, 2016. - The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) has released its first ever comprehensive study on the impact of conflicts and crisis on children in Africa during its 28th Ordinary Session currently taking place in Banjul, The Gambia.

The Study originates from a Decision of the African Union Executive Council which requested the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) to take into account the rights of the child in its agenda and cooperate actively with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Decision EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI)). In view of implementing such Decision, the ACERWC held an Open Session with the African Union PSC on 18 February 2014 where the Council suggested for the ACERWC to undertake a study which assesses the situation of children in armed conflict and its impact across the Continent. Taking the suggestion in good order, the Committee kicked off the process in undertaking a comprehensive continental study on the impact of conflicts and crises on children in Africa.

The study concentrates on conflicts and crises across Africa over the last 10 years and the measures by State and non-State actors to protect the rights of children during and in the aftermath of such situations. It addresses psychological impact, education, health, nutrition/food security, separation from parents/caregivers, and sexual and gender-based violence. Child rights underlie its analysis, particularly the best interest of the child; the rights to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child as evidenced through children's voices.

The countries in the study are divided into two groups: (1) countries in active conflict (2) countries in fragile post-conflict situations or in a major humanitarian crisis requiring a system-wide response. The countries in the first group are Burundi, Central African Republic, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. Those in the second group are Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Sudan.

The study addresses Kenya differently than the other countries. Its children and young people are currently the targets of indoctrination and radicalization by extremist groups, which are encouraging perpetration of violence. Radicalization is being sown in schools and communities. Though this phenomenon is not limited to Kenya (Cameroon, Libya, Mali and Nigeria in particular are also affected), but in Kenya children are being indoctrinated and then sent to fight abroad, in Somalia, this therefore makes Kenya the 'labour market supplier' of radicalized children and youth, while also periodically suffering from these acts itself.

The study reveals that *"**accountability for violations in conflict situations remains a serious problem. Accountability extends to States, which have not been effective in preventing, stopping or managing conflicts and crisis situations in a manner sufficient to reduce their impact on children. No lessons seem to have been learned from earlier conflicts; the same violations continue and States remain aloof to the plight of their children.**"*

The study also takes into consideration the fact that recent trends in armed conflict have resulted in new challenges for the protection of children's rights. Previously armed conflict involved confrontations between states, whereas now it mainly consists of high levels of prolonged violence involving a state and one or more armed groups. As battle lines become blurred and fragmented, armed groups increasingly rely on improvised explosive devices and suicide missions, as well as on the use of children to carry out attacks. Both boys and girls have been targeted for recruitment and use by such groups, which indoctrinate and manipulate in order to coerce or force children to participate in hostilities, including acts of extreme violence. Girls and boys are often unaware of the actions or consequences of the acts they are manipulated or coerced to commit. The potential risk of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation of boys and girls is alarmingly increasing in the context of conflicts and crises.

Being the first of its kind at the level of an Organ of the African Union, the study draws urgency towards Member States to address the challenges that children are facing in conflict situations and halt recruiting and using children for military purposes. Taking the new challenges into consideration, the study, particularly, urges for a high level commitment from Member States to establish effective and functioning mechanisms to address the impact of conflict and crises on children and provide for the care and protection of children affected by armed conflict.

With a view of impacting programs and policies, the findings of the study will be submitted to the AU Executive Council for adoption, and widely disseminated among stakeholders.

For further information, please contact:
Mr. Kameni N. Yannick : KameniY@africa-union.org
Mr. Ayalew Getachew Assefa: AyalewG@africa-union.org
ACERWC Secretariat