

OPENING REMARKS BY
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SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL
TRAINING ON COMESA'S EARLY WARNING SYSTEM
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Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, All protocols observed. Good Morning!

Save the Children's Protecting Children in Conflict Team is extremely grateful for the opportunity to attend this training on COMESA's unique Early Warning System and would like to expressly acknowledge the esteemed presence of the;

- Honourable Representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Kenya,
- Honorable Representative from the Parliament of Kenya,
- Honorable Representative from the National Cohesion and Integration Commission,
- Your Excellency, Madam Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, the Secretary General COMESA,
- Dear colleagues from the government of Kenya, COMESA, Save the Children, Other Civil Society Organizations, distinguished guests, all protocols observed.

As we embark on this journey together, I cannot sufficiently emphasize the strategic role played by the African Union, the Continental/Regional Economic Communities, the Continental/Regional Mechanisms, Members States and other global partners in contributing to peace and stability on the continent, and to ensure the fulfilment of children's rights.

The most burdensome brunt of armed violence and warfare is borne by children. Children suffer in conflict in different ways to adults, with their entire future at stake; with their physical, mental and psychosocial development directly shaped by the conditions they experience as children. Many are subjected to abductions, military recruitment, killing, maiming, and numerous forms of child exploitation.

Today, as we sit here, six out of ten worst countries for children in conflict are hosted on this continent. But we have the power to change this trajectory through the deliberations and commitments we make during this conference.

Juma "I lost my friend during the 2016 conflict in South Sudan, I had to run to Uganda for safety. While there. I stayed for 2 years without going to school," Juma....

It's time for us to Stop the War and give children like Juma hope for a brighter future.

In reality “Every War is A War on Children, and the suffering of millions of children should never be accepted as inevitable.”

- 420 million children – nearly one-fifth of children worldwide – live in a conflict zone, which is a rise of almost 30 million children from 2016. 170 Million of these children are in Africa.
- The number of children living in conflict zones has doubled since the end of the Cold War.
- 142 million children are living in high-intensity conflict-zones; that is, in conflict zones with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in a year.
- In Africa alone, 1 in 4 children will be caught up in intense conflicts and 6 of the 10 most dangerous countries for children to live in are in Africa
- According to the United Nations the number of grave violations of children’s rights in conflict reported and verified by the United Nations has almost tripled since 2010.¹ These violations are:
 - Killing and maiming of children;
 - Recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups;
 - Sexual violence against children;
 - Abduction of children;
 - Attacks against schools and hospitals;
 - Denial of humanitarian access for children.

¹ Save the Children, ‘Stop the War on Children’, 2019, p.9, <https://www.stopwaronchildren.org/report.pdf> (accessed 8 September 2020)

The extent and severity of grave violations of children's rights in conflict affected countries is further supported by recent data produced by the global UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), which verifies that while progress has been made with respect to sexual violence and attacks on schools in recent years, progress on addressing recruitment and use of children in conflict is less favorable. Furthermore, while trends indicate declines of grave violations of children's rights in some of these countries in recent years, many violations remain unreported, under-reported or inadequately documented. In many cases, drivers of conflict and recruitment remain unaddressed and systemic innovations to address challenges remain weak.

The devastating impact of conflict and violations against children cannot be overstated. From deprivation of rights to physical survival including the right to live and right to develop, right to personal safety and security to lack of food, water, good healthcare. closure of schools and collapse of education systems, broken community structures, separation and displacement, psychosocial trauma and other forms of abuse and list goes on and on.

The reality is indeed this:

- if we do not address the real structural drivers of conflict,
- if we do not build stronger systems for governance and accountability
- If we do not collect, analyze and verify timely and accurate data.
- if we do not build trust between children, communities, policy makers and governments
- If we simply do not include children, who tomorrow become the youth and young change makers in our society in the peace agenda

We continuously risk remaining in a state of limbo and fragility-vulnerable to new, evolving and emerging threats to peace and security, including ethnical biases, electoral violence, resource-based conflicts and even pandemics such as COVID-19

As Save the Children we therefore strongly affirm that the best form of protection for children is the actual and real prevention of conflict. We firmly acknowledge that successful conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution lies in an awareness of potential conflict situations including an effective early warning system that addresses the structural drivers of conflict, an ability to analyse relevant information and data from such a system, the involvement and interaction between parties and victims(including children and youth) in conflict contexts as well as the political good will to take the right action when it is needed.

Beyond addressing the mere symptoms of conflict, it is essential to deal with a conflict's root causes to ensure sustainable peace. It is on this note that we would like to recognize and applaud COMESA for developing their Early Warning System, in tandem and complimentary with the AU Continental Early Warning System that specifically seeks to identify and address the structural drivers of conflict. We cannot overemphasize the importance of better synergies between regional, continental, and international early-warning structures as well as civil society's, children, youth and women's involvement in these processes.

As Save the Children we shall continue working to help children living in conflict across the continent, however, the causes and impact of the grave violations on children cannot be confronted by aid agencies like us alone. This is why we are calling on all of us to join efforts and make a real difference for children affected by armed conflict. Our plea is that all parties uphold standards of conduct in conflict, hold perpetrators to account, and step up investment to prevent the grim impact of conflict on children from happening in the first place, as well as help children that are victims of war to recover from the physical and psychological wounds.

Fatou "Growing up in a conflict zone in Mali denies children like me the right to education, security & a future with hope. My friends cannot sleep at night due to traumatic situations they have been in. I want to tell our leaders that enough is enough,"

Save the Children therefore welcomes the partnership with COMESA other RECs, governments and CSOs; and reiterate our commitment to jointly support the development of child-friendly indicators to strengthen the existing Early Warning System to reflect the actual situation on the ground and provide accurate data for the better protection of children and youth in situations of conflict, for ultimately, a peaceful, secure and stable Africa.

Our humanity demands that we act, and our future depends on it. If these children are left behind, we cannot fulfil the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals and lay the foundations for a peaceful and prosperous society. A society where we can guarantee survival, protection and hope for all children.

Together we can stop the children of today from becoming the forgotten generations of tomorrow.

Thank you and I wish us all fruitful deliberations