

27 October 2016

Immediate release

Press Release

Peace Envoys and Mediators in Africa Call for Peace from Sharm El Sheikh

Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt - The Cairo Center for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA) hosted the **7th Annual High-Level African Union Retreat for Special Envoys and Mediators on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa** on 26-27 October 2016. The Retreat was hosted in cooperation with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (EMFA), with support from the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). Titled “*Silencing the Guns: Mediation Practices and Modern Wars*”, the Retreat provided an opportunity for reflection and a frank exchange of views on the challenges of mediation and peacemaking in today’s fast-paced, interconnected and intricate world.

Speaking on behalf of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry gave the opening speech, which highlighted Egypt’s prioritization of African issues through its foreign policy and dual membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC). The speech also emphasized Egypt’s holistic approach to addressing threats, challenges and risks to peace and security issues in Africa as one that (i) emphasizes the primacy of politics over military solutions; (ii) focuses on preventing and resolving conflicts, instead of just managing them; (iii) advocates a continuum of peace interventions (peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding); and (iv) prioritizes national ownership.

Moreover, President el-Sisi called for further investments in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), enabling the continent to address the ever-changing nature of conflict and to effectively respond to new and emerging threats. The President also highlighted two Egyptian initiatives in this regard, namely the establishment of an AUC Mediation Unit and the establishment of the AU Center for Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (AUC PCRD) - stating that Egypt has offered to host the latter. He also called for enhancement of the strategic partnership between the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). The President then praised “CCCPA’s efforts in building and enhancing African capacities in dealing with crises and conflict, through its holistic approach” and thanked it for organizing the Retreat, in cooperation with the AUC.

Following the opening speech, Ambassador Smail Chergui, African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, officially opened the event. Chergui stressed that the decision to focus the Sharm El Sheikh Retreat discussions on mediation practices comes in the context of the AUC’s continuous efforts to sharpen “understanding of this most important peacekeeping tool: conflict mediation”. The Retreat provides “the ideal environment for forward-looking, bold and creative solutions to today’s most pressing problems”, he added.

During the two-day event, participants considered the experiences, challenges and opportunities of mediation in addressing both conventional and unconventional armed conflicts. They critically examined the gaps between the normative framework of mediation

on one hand, and the reality and practice of mediation on the other, with a particular focus on the African context, as well as lessons learned and best practices from other regions of the world.

Participants noted the correlation between peace, security and development - highlighting the synergies between UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU Agenda 2063, since both are grounded in a people-centered approach. They also stressed the need for a collective mediation architecture in an over-crowded mediation space, with international, regional, national and non-governmental mediators involved. Standards of neutrality and impartiality were touched upon repeatedly throughout the discussion.

One of the major debates during the 2016 Retreat was whether or not to engage terrorist groups in mediation processes. While some participants opposed engaging terrorist groups in negotiations, others viewed it as essential to achieving peace in current conflicts. Participants also highlighted the importance of engaging religious leaders in mediation processes, given their important role as traditional peacemakers. Other issues discussed include the role of media in mediation processes, the impact of conflict on children, and the need for building and enhancing the capacities of mediators.

The Master of Ceremony concluded the Retreat by reading the “Sharm El Sheikh Declaration on Silencing the Guns”. Most importantly, the declaration underlined the need for strengthening early warning mechanisms, as well as the need for mediation to operate in a continuum that includes efforts to stop violence, build trust, and identify and address the root causes of conflicts. The declaration also emphasized the need to systematically and meaningfully involve women and youth in mediation, as well as pay particular attention to the protection of children in armed conflicts. The development of an institutional framework to address resource-based conflicts was also amongst the timely issues that stated in the declaration.

The Retreat brought together more than 100 high-level officials including representatives of international and regional organizations, regional economic communities and mechanisms (RECs/RMs), members of the African Union (AU) Panel of the Wise, and heads of AU Liaison Offices, think tanks and mediation practitioners.

The AU High-Level Retreat on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa was launched as an Egyptian initiative in 2010 in cooperation with the AUC. Since then, the event has been utilized as a permanent coordination mechanism between the AU, the UN and regional organizations and mechanisms in peace and security issues on the African continent. CCCPA’s contribution to this year’s Retreat was made possible - in part- by the generous support of the Government of Japan (GoJ), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ford Foundation.