Silencing the Guns through the Promotion and Deepening of the AU Shared Values

As we commemorate the 17th Anniversary of the African Peer Review Mechanism’s (APRM) founding on 9 March 2003, it is important to reflect and take stock of progress in governance while on the road towards universal accession to the Mechanism by 2023. At present, 40 countries have voluntarily acceded to the APRM, including the Republic of Seychelles and the Republic of Zimbabwe, which joined the APRM Family at its 29th APRM Forum of Heads of State and Government held on 08 February 2020, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This year APRM Day, 09 March, will be celebrated under the theme: Silencing the Guns through the Promotion and Deepening of the AU Shared Values. The African Union Peace and Security Council’s Roadmap for Silencing the Guns recognizes that, beyond the ongoing political and military efforts, there is need for structural conflict prevention by addressing issues of governance such as inclusiveness, youth, gender and human rights, climate change and other critical factors that underlie many conflicts on the Continent.

It is against this background that in January 2018, the Assembly of the Union decided to include the APRM and streamline its work into the Silencing the Guns Agenda and Roadmap, thus positioning the APRM as a pre-emptive Early Warning Tool for Conflict Prevention and expanding the capacity of Africa to rely on such home-grown knowledge that will allow for African solutions to African problems.

Silencing the Guns is a timely theme this year, following the objective set in 2013 by the African Union (AU) for it to occur by 2020. Member States and citizens should use this year to reflect on how they can contribute towards a conflict free and peaceful Africa, as well as identify strategies to accelerate socio-economic development through peace building and good governance.

The Status of Peace and Security in Africa

Most conflicts in Africa are rooted in governance deficits, which include mismanagement of diversity, manipulation of constitutions, marginalization of the youth and mismanagement of natural resources. In this regard, the PSC has urged all Member States to redouble their efforts and improve their governance systems.

The Africa Governance Report (AGR) 2019 indicates that there were twenty-one (21) conflicts in the 55 African Union Member States as of July 2018. It identifies four (4) major conflict zones: the Mano River Region, the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel/Maghreb Region. While large-scale wars have declined in proportion to the population in recent years, political violence such as riots and violence against civilians has increased. Moreover, internal conflicts within Member States are now more prevalent, while there are fewer conflicts between States, when compared to two or three decades ago when inter-state conflicts such as the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea were more common.

AU Efforts to Promote Peace and Security

The African Union has, in terms of policy and practice, established a framework for strengthening democratic governance and towards attaining peace and security. Despite this framework, however, the
Continental continues to grapple with intractable, violent conflict. Indeed, the AU peace and security framework faces various challenges, including the lack of commitment by Member States to implement shared values instruments such as respect for human rights, that could mitigate the root causes of many conflicts. To address these challenges, the Africa Governance Report 2019 encourages the Member States of the AU to:

(i) ensure signature, ratification and implementation of all relevant instruments for peace, security and stability; and

(ii) strengthen the Peace and Security Council (PSC) as recommended by the Assembly of The African Union Eleventh Extraordinary Session of November 2018.

AGR 2019 also encourages the AU to operationalize the African Standby Force, and increase efforts to secure sustainable funding of peace and security activities.

In a nutshell, violence and crises on the continent are rooted in and exacerbated by governance deficits. These are a threat to the realisation of an Africa which is peaceful, progressive and prosperous. The strengthening of conflict prevention efforts through a focus on the root causes of conflict, as reflected in APRM’s country review reports on democratic governance are, therefore, an important source of support for the AU’s peace and security agenda, and indeed the Silencing the Guns objectives.