



United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU)

Opening Remarks

by

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to the African Union and Head of UNOAU**

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Check Against Delivery

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Each year the International Day of Peace is observed worldwide on 21 September. The UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, intended as a day that underscores tolerance, inclusion, understanding and solidarity. This year, the UN's theme for the International Day of Peace is "End racism. Build peace."

I am grateful to Commissioner Bankole's Office for hosting us today to celebrate this important day together here at the African Union in partnership with our colleagues and friends from the German Embassy and the GIZ, among others. I am particularly delighted to see so many young people, including AU Youth Ambassadors, some of whom I met with in June in Cairo on the margins of the Aswan Forum and with whom UNOAU is proud to be associated.

Our coming together today to celebrate this year's Peace Day is also a manifestation of our strong ties as laid out in the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. Our two organizations continue to work jointly on opportunities for collaboration in addressing Africa's complex peace and security challenges, through strengthened collaboration.

Dear friends, we do have a clear agenda before us: End racism and build peace.

Firstly, how can we end racism?

If anything, we must acknowledge that the term racism itself is based on historical lies made to justify a system of exploitation. Science reminds us that there is only one human race, whose birthplace is here in Africa.

Yet, the scares of what we have come to know as systemic racism are a reality that continues to affect our world.

That is why a world free of racism and racial discrimination remains a commitment to which the United Nations is invested, including through the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations as outlined in the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It is a commitment that is also

addressed in the Secretary-General's Strategic Action Plan against racism in the United Nations. We seek to create a world where knowledge, mutual understanding, compassion and empathy overcome ignorance, exclusion, discrimination, bigotry and hatred, which still fuel so many conflicts nowadays.

Speaking at the opening of the Transforming Education Summit in New York last Monday, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated, quote: "At a time of rampant misinformation, climate denial and attacks on human rights, we need education systems that distinguish fact from conspiracy, instill respect for science, and celebrate humanity in all its diversity.", unquote.

We must indeed aim to achieve a purposeful education that eradicates ignorance, identity-based exclusions and uplifts the common values that binds humanity together.

Secondly, we need to build peace.

And as UNESCO reminds us "Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that peace must be built". So, here too, education is a prerequisite in furtherance of more harmonious and peaceful societies.

Admittedly, the past years have reminded us of the fragility of peace: today, more than ever, peace in Africa and elsewhere seems to be challenged by a multitude of threats. One-quarter of humanity, 2 billion people, are currently living in conflict areas, and the world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945.

The attainment of peace, justice, freedom and shared prosperity are the very reason for the work of our two organizations.

In 1945, the United Nations was established to, quote, 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war' and 'to [ensure we] live together in peace' and in larger freedom.

But the UN Charter didn't only set a lofty goal. Because wars are not unavoidable, the Charter also provided member states with concrete steps to apply in an effort to genuinely avert the scourge of war. Article 33 Charter provides that, quote: "The parties to any dispute, the continuance of

which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.”, unquote.

Our troubled times are indeed in need of what the Secretary-General calls a “surge in diplomacy”. The genuine and relentless efforts to use all the tools at our disposal to avert conflicts, by all means. And even when all best efforts fall short of preventing devastating conflicts, there must still be room for containment and restraint to avoid humanitarian crises of catastrophic proportions.

Today, should be a reminder to all of us that we need to live up to these promises in solidarity with those all victims of deadly conflicts and in a renewed commitment to young people and future generations.

We also need to remind ourselves that peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but it requires active, inclusive, and participatory processes. We therefore need to dedicate more attention to the imperative of ensuring women’s and youth’s participation in all aspects of political, social and economic life, including peacebuilding activities. Research has shown that sustainable peace can only be achieved through the inclusion of women and young people in peacebuilding.

I am therefore delighted that today’s celebration is devoted to our young people, their innovative potential and more specifically to the use of technology in peacebuilding.

Technology can contribute to peacebuilding processes by offering tools that encourage collaboration, educate the public on issues of concern, mobilize political will, and give a stronger voice to otherwise marginalized communities. And this is recognized in the AU’s Agenda 2063, as well as the UN’s Agenda 2030 which place youth at the center of both decision making and problem solving. I commend the African Union Youth for Peace Africa Program for its continued drive and achievements that nurture and leverage the potential of Africa’s youth by ensuring their inclusion. The launch of the serious game ‘Mission 55 – Conflict in Anaka’ developed by our GIZ and AU colleagues is an exemplary illustration of how we can use innovative approaches to raise

awareness and to reach young women and men to learn more about the AU's invaluable work on peace and security on the continent and more specifically to raise awareness among young people on the AU's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to thank our colleagues from the AU Youth for Peace Team and from the GIZ for their innovative work on the serious game; with special acknowledgement of the young developers here present with us. I am looking forward to today's discussion on 'Use of Technology in Peacebuilding in Africa' and would like to wish good luck to all of those who will be participating in the gaming competition today.

I am convinced that such initiatives will contribute a great deal into advancing knowledge and fairness as critical assets in our shared commitment to ending racism and building a safer, more peaceful and prosperous world for all.

Thank you for your kind attention.