

Statement by H.E. Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve,
Ambassador, Permanent

Representative to the United Nations

Security Council

Debate

"Mobilising the Youth towards Silencing the Guns by 2020"

New York, 2 October 2019

Mr President,

Belgium supports the initiative "Silencing the Guns by 2020" in Africa. We welcome the AU's intention to put youth at the heart of this initiative.

The African continent is the only one where the youth population continues to grow year on year. By 2050, the population of the continent is expected to double, from 1 billion today to nearly 2.4 billion. That means that half of its inhabitants will be younger than 25. This prospect offers extraordinary opportunities for innovation and creativity. But this demographic upheaval, if not supported, also carries the risk of new difficulties for the continent.

Political, social and economic exclusion is a risk factor. This can fuel a collective mistrust of the national and international political institutions that are supposed to serve and protect young people. It is therefore essential to invest in education and in creating an environment which is conducive to the participation and inclusion of young adults in peace processes, including mediation processes. Equal access to inclusive and high-quality education, and the opportunity to find decent work, are key elements in creating this environment.

For these reasons, one of the priorities of Belgian cooperation in Africa is the socio-economic integration of the youth, as in Uganda, where we support the

implementation of the "Skilling Uganda" policy, in Morocco where we are stimulating entrepreneurship among young people, or in Burkina Faso, where Belgium is strengthening the digital skills of young people.

Security Council resolution 2419 calls for greater inclusion of the youth in peace processes. This text has undoubtedly become relevant in the African context.

We must recognise the fact that young people are actors in their own right. In this regard, we need to change our norms, actions and attitudes.

Furthermore, youth often constitute the majority of armed groups in Africa. The inclusion of young people should be central to DDR and SSR processes, community violence reduction programmes and actions to prevent violent extremism.

I would like to conclude by welcoming the initiatives undertaken by the AU to foster greater involvement of youth, and I commend the work of its Special Envoy for Youth, Aya Chebbi.

Here too, partnerships are a vehicle for new ideas and original initiatives. Belgium supports civil society initiatives and cooperation platforms such as the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, which implements pilot projects, in particular in the area of peace and security, between young people from the African continent and the European continent.

Thank you.