

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

at the United Nations Security Council

High-level open debate - Silencing the guns in Africa: How can  
the UN-AU partnership contribute to a continent free of conflict

New York, 27 February 2019

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Mr President,

We would like to start by thanking Equatorial Guinea for organising this high-level debate.

We would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Peacebuilding, the High Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the founder and Executive Director of ACCORD and all the other Council members for their interventions this morning.

This open debate on the African Union's initiative to '*Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020*' is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the deepening of the United Nations - African Union partnership.

Mr President,

Today, I would like to focus on three main messages:

**Firstly: Belgium welcomes this important initiative.**

It demonstrates, once again, the vital importance of leadership and of African ownership of issues of peace and security on the continent. It also shows the strength of the partnership between the African Union and the United Nations. We share the same challenges and have a collective duty to provide answers.

**Secondly: we must continue our deliberations, but we must first and foremost take action on the ground.**

The ambition of the 'Silence the Guns by the Year 2020' initiative reminds us of the magnitude of the challenges on the ground.

At international level, we must redouble our efforts to improve the regulation of the international trade in conventional weapons and prevent and combat illegal arms trafficking. We must seek better coordination between the various regional and international arms control systems and mechanisms.

At the same time, at national level, we must also ensure that we ratify and implement existing instruments, such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

**Finally: for Belgium, it is essential to maintain a holistic approach to this initiative.**

The primary aim of this initiative is to rid the African continent of armed conflict. But it also allows us to deepen our deliberations on the continent's development and further integration.

In this context, this initiative must pay attention to the deep roots of the conflicts, whether political, economic or linked to the violation of human rights.

While the political challenges, including the importance of good governance, participation and inclusion, are well known, the economic challenges are less so. In this context, Belgium calls for particular attention to be paid to the problem of the exploitation, trafficking and illegal trade in natural resources, particularly conflict minerals, such as tin, the 3Ts, gold, diamonds, coal and cobalt, as well as wildlife. These have contributed to the outbreak, intensification and continuation of many armed conflicts. That is why we encourage the organised, transparent and sustainable management of natural resources, including through the promotion of responsible practices throughout the supply chain.

This initiative must also recognise the crucial role of women and youth.

Belgium considers it particularly important to improve access to justice for women in conflict or post-conflict situations, as well as to ensure adequate reparation for victims. We must also recognise the important and positive contribution of youth in conflict prevention and resolution and in post-conflict situations.

Thank you for your attention.