

**Your Excellency Felix Moloua, Prime Minister of Central Africa Republic and Head of Government;**

**Distinguished Members of the Council;**

**AU Special Representative of the African Union to the Central African Republic,**

**Representative of ECCAS;**

**Representative of the United Nations;**

**H.E. Jean Pierre Betindji, Executive Secretary RECSA;**

**Representative of the CSOs;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Allow me to begin by thanking the Government and people of the Central African Republic for their warm welcome and hospitality and especially for hosting the Peace and Security Council of the African Union as it launches the 2024 event of Africa Amnesty Month.

Let me take the opportunity to extend my gratitude to the Members of the Peace and Security Council for the month of September, for the leadership in ensuring the realization of this all-important event, the commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month pursuant to relevant Assembly Decisions.

As you may recall, it was the Republic of Cameroon that chaired the conduct of the Africa Amnesty Month for 2023, held in Maputo, Mozambique; today, again, I am chairing the commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month in our sisterly beloved country, Central African Republic. Although it might appear as a coincidence, for us, it is a testimony and demonstration of the seriousness that the Republic of Cameroon attaches to the Africa Amnesty Month initiative.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Illicit arms, including small arms and light weapons, have a direct and adverse effect on human and State security, peace, socio-economic development, and democratic governance in our Member States. These weapons fuel criminal violence like armed robberies, inter-communal violence, insurgencies, and terrorism, exacerbating the complex security challenges that Africa is grappling with.

As you are aware, the Africa Amnesty Month is an initiative that emanates from a decision of the leadership of the African Union. Allow me to recall that in 2017, the African Union (AU) proclaimed

September of each year as “Africa Amnesty Month for the surrender and collection of illicit small arms and light weapons”, and to encourage widespread support for efforts to stop the smuggling of SALW as well as advance and enhance the AU’s “Silence the Guns in Africa” by 2030 initiative. In line with this practice, the AU has always urged its Member States to continue with the “Silencing the Guns” initiatives throughout the year to sustain any momentum gained during September.

Also, Africa’s Regional Economic Communities, other pan-African bodies and civil society organizations are encouraged to widely publicize Africa Amnesty Month to promote citizens’ participation, pursuant to the AU Master Roadmap on Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa. The first Amnesty Month was held in September 2017, and saw activities in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Sudan, Zambia and here in Central African Republic. Since then, many of our Member States have shown demonstrated commitment to the implementation of the initiative. Africa Amnesty Month aims to encourage civilians to surrender their illegal weapons to competent government authorities without fear of arrest or prosecution, a critical step by Member States in the promotion and implementation of the Silencing the Guns initiative.

One issue of equal and critical importance for all actors, including Member States, partners, and other stakeholders, is to properly identify and address the factors that drive civilians’ acquisition of small arms and light weapons.

This is essential as one of the success factors of the Africa Amnesty Month, and any other voluntary disarmament programs that Member States may be implementing. These factors are as diverse as social, political, economic, cultural, as well as environmental –sometimes a complex cocktail. So, as Member States endeavor promote the voluntary surrender of illicit weapons, focus on addressing such factors that promote the appetite to own a firearm illegally ought to be addressed. This will create the conditions conducive for voluntary disarmament and will lead to sustainable programs. Against this backdrop, addressing the issue of Illicit Financial Flows is key. For Africa to succeed in safeguarding human security and socio-economic development, Africans should ensure full ownership and the efficient management of our natural resources to finance all the continent’s peace and development initiatives by embarking on drastic steps and strategies to curb and/or eradicate Illicit Financial Flows from the continent.

The AU Commission, working in collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms, initiated a process to develop a Continental Plan of Action on Silencing the Guns that identifies priorities in area of voluntary disarmament. This process is yet to be accomplished, and I wish to encourage all interested parties to join in this initiative.

We shall also embark on taking stock of the implementation of Africa Amnesty Month this far, documenting good practices and lessons learned, as well as highlighting challenges in this area. This will strengthen the implementation of the Africa Amnesty Month in the coming years.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

As we continue to rely on the sustained commitment of the Member States and RECs/RMs in addressing the threat of illicit firearms, I wish to recognize our partnership with the United Nations, Civil Society and Faith-Based organizations, and other stakeholders, whose exceptional contributions contribute to the success of this event. Our collective efforts will contribute to the goal of the realization of the *“The Africa We Want”* under Agenda 2063 where peace, security and development thrive.

As I conclude, let us seize this opportunity to renew our commitment to support efforts towards the voluntary surrender of illicit small arms and light weapons, and it is my hope that we will have a candid exchange of views in this regard. I extend our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Central African Republic, the United Nations, and RECSA for their full support in implementing Africa Amnesty Month.

All the best for the 2024 commemoration of Africa Amnesty Month Africa Amnesty Month; let's call all AU Member States to use this critical opportunity to engage the civilians, educate and sensitize them on the importance of Africa Amnesty Month, and encourage and give them guidance to freely surrender illegally owned weapons.

**Thank you for your kind attention.**