HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON STRENGTHENING AFRICAN-LED CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION

Seizing the Unique Opportunity that the Luanda Summit Presents

EXTERNAL REPORT

July 2026

Context

Africa's peace and security landscape is under mounting strain from protracted armed conflicts, democratic backsliding, non-state armed groups, climate-related instability, attacks on civilians and geopolitical competition. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) already provides substantial tools for prevention and resolution - including the Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise, the African Standby Force, the Peace Fund and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) - as do Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs). In practice, however, these instruments do not consistently function as a connected system: *warnings often fail to trigger political engagement, mediation lacks follow-up, financing favours crisis response over prevention, and community actors remain peripheral to formal decision-making.*

Against this backdrop, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), Amani Africa and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) convened a High-Level Dialogue on 20 July 2026 in Addis Ababa under the theme '*Strengthening African-Led Conflict Prevention and Resolution: Seizing the Unique Opportunity that the Luanda Summit Presents'.* Held in advance of the Extraordinary AU Summit to be hosted by Angola, the dialogue brought together representatives of a Member State, a REC, civil society and community-level practitioners. It examined why existing mechanisms have underperformed, how leadership and political will can be generated, where prevention is already taking place, what commitments the Summit should adopt and how financing can reach both continental institutions and local actors.

The session was moderated by Ms. Lesley Connolly, Regional Policy and Advocacy Manager at Nonviolent Peaceforce, and featured a moderated panel comprising Lieutenant-Colonel Domingos Sapaulo, Defence Attaché at the Permanent Mission of Angola to the African Union; Ambassador Jevin Pili Ponsami, Permanent Representative of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to the African Union; Mr. Chris Obwona, Head of Programs, Nonviolent Peaceforce Sudan Program; and Ms. Mahelet Hagos, Program Officer, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). The dialogue was preceded by welcoming remarks from Amani Africa and closed with remarks from the FES African Union Cooperation Office.

Main Issues

Implementation Is the Central Gap, Not Design

Participants repeatedly stressed that APSA's weakness is not a shortage of frameworks but the distance between adoption and action. Existing instruments, available to the AU Commission, Member States and RECs, routinely go unused not because they are unavailable but because no actor moves first to activate them. Missions report back, communiqués are adopted and initiatives are launched, but activity is not the same as effectiveness; the relevant test is whether conditions on the ground actually change. ***Speakers called for an implementation architecture that assigns each commitment to a named responsible institution, sets a timeline and financing pathway, and requires periodic reporting to the PSC. The Summit, it was argued, should produce fewer but sharper decisions, each answering four questions: who acts, by when, with what resources, and how progress will be verified.***

Leadership and Political Will Must Be Cultivated

Political will was reframed as something generated through leadership willing to spend political capital, not a condition that simply arrives or is absent. Discussants noted that low-cost, low-risk actions - convening fragmented mediation initiatives operating in the same crisis theatre, or dispatching a senior AU mission to a capital that has gone years without high-level attention- remain available at any time but require someone to decide to act. ***Angola's role as Summit host was presented as an illustration of this kind of initiative in their framing the Summit as an opportunity to move the continent from a reactive posture, responding after conflicts escalate, toward a proactive one focused on prevention, and to press Heads of State to strengthen how conflicts are addressed.***

Communities Are Already Doing Prevention Work

A recurring theme was that the prevention architecture is designed almost entirely around state and institutional actors, even though local peace committees, traditional and religious authorities, and women's and youth networks already negotiate access, mediate disputes, identify threats and organise civilian protection, often before continental mechanisms engage at all. Little of this activity is visible to the Continental Early Warning System. Experience from Sudan, including Darfur and the

2025 crisis in El Fasher and Tawila, was cited to show how community structures enabled early relocation of civilians, mediated local ceasefires, and supported the identification, tracing and reunification of unaccompanied children, even where they could not prevent violence outright. ***Speakers were clear this is not a case for substituting community action for the AU or RECs, but for formally recognizing them and linking community structures to national, regional and continental systems and, thus, resourcing them directly, rather than only through international, national or regional intermediaries.***

AU–REC/RM Coordination Needs to Move from Principle to Practice

RECs/RMs bring political relationships, proximity and operational tools that position them as early responders to crises, illustrated by SADC's experience in Madagascar, Lesotho, Mozambique and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Yet coordination between the AU and RECs/RMs remains largely informal: the AU–REC Division of Labour document has been in development for nine years and validated at political level in 2021, but not formally implemented, and continental and regional early-warning systems were described as operating largely in silos. ***Proposals included formally recognising RECs/RMs as first responders with the AU as an automatic supporting mechanism rather than one that must first be petitioned, establishing standard procedures for routing regional early-warning information to the PSC, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation, including through more frequent African Peer Review Mechanism engagement with the PSC and RECs/RMs.***

From Early Warning to Early Action

Participants agreed the central problem is less the generation of early-warning information than what happens once it is received: sovereignty concerns, institutional caution and unclear escalation procedures often prevent a timely political response. At the community level, by contrast, early warning is inseparable from immediate action - movement to safety, dialogue among local leaders and protective presence. ***The dialogue called for common early-warning-to-action protocols spanning local, national, regional and continental levels, with clear thresholds, defined response options, and feedback mechanisms so communities can see how their information was used.***

Financing Does Not Reach Where Prevention Happens

Peace and security financing on the continent originates overwhelmingly from outside Africa, which undermines full African agency. Additionally, the limited financing that is mobilised is skewed toward visible crisis response and large operations rather than preventive diplomacy, mediation and community protection. This raised a strategic question for the Summit: whether the AU should keep aspiring to mount large multidimensional operations it cannot sustainably finance, or concentrate resources where it holds comparative advantage. ***Speakers called for stronger Member State contributions, more deliberate use of the Peace Fund, better-balanced partner financing, and direct, accountable funding windows that community-level and civil society actors can access without routing exclusively through international or national intermediaries.***

Inclusion, Sovereignty and Protection of Civilians

Discussion tested proposals against difficult political realities: how Article 4(h) and the principle of non-indifference can be applied when Member States resist scrutiny, and how prevention tools can be reframed as valuable for security, governance and regime stability rather than only as constraints on sovereignty. Participants called for broader inclusion of non-state actors - armed groups, women's groups, traditional authorities, faith leaders and communities - in formal negotiation and mediation processes. ***Civilian protection, including for children, was raised as a priority for the Summit's deliberations, with participants noting the scale of displacement and disrupted access to education affecting children in conflict-affected areas, and community-based mechanisms for family tracing, reunification and monitoring of child recruitment cited as existing practice worth scaling and resourcing.***

Recommendations

1. Adopt a concise Luanda action agenda with named institutional owners, deadlines, financing requirements and measurable indicators for each commitment.
2. Operationalise the AU–REC/RM peace and security division of labour through standing coordination, joint assessments, information exchange and agreed support triggers.
3. Establish a rapid political-response practice enabling early consultation, senior preventive missions and sustained political accompaniment.
4. Develop common early-warning-to-action protocols linking community, national, regional and continental systems, with feedback on action taken.
5. Create formal channels connecting community prevention and civilian-protection structures to APSA, with accessible, accountable financing windows for locally led action.
6. Pair every Summit commitment with a costed financing plan, and strengthen African contributions to preventive diplomacy, mediation and local protection.
7. Embed women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, and traditional, religious and civil society leaders in Summit implementation and monitoring from the outset.
8. Use peer review, regular implementation reporting and stronger PSC–REC/RM consultation to generate political accountability and continuity across AU chairmanships.
9. Align partnerships with the UN and other external actors behind African-led priorities, while protecting continental agency and strategic coherence.

Conclusion

The dialogue's central finding was that Africa's conflict-prevention deficit is not a shortage of principles or institutions, but a weak connection between warning and action, mediation and follow-up, continental and regional responsibilities, financing and implementation, and formal institutions

and the communities that prevent violence every day. APSA provides an institutional foundation, RECs/RMs bring proximity and political leverage, communities bring timely knowledge and legitimacy, and civil society can connect the two. Realising this potential requires clear leadership, shared procedures, predictable financing and measurable accountability.

The Luanda Summit was framed as a credibility test: reaffirming non-indifference, African solutions to African problems and the primacy of prevention will not be enough unless resulting decisions can be implemented and reviewed. Success should be visible in faster political engagement, stronger AU–REC/RM coordination, better-supported community action, and continuity after the Summit concludes.

Nonviolent Peaceforce *is an international organization that works to protect civilians in violent conflicts through unarmed strategies, build peace side-by-side with local communities, and advocate for the wider adoption of these approaches to safeguard human lives and dignity. Headquartered in Geneva, NP has 10 country programs globally as well as advocacy representation that covers the African Union, European Union, United States of America and United Nations.*

Amani Africa *is an independent Pan-African think tank committed to delivering in-depth, African-centric research and analysis on the African Union system, with a particular focus on Peace and Security, democratic governance and constitutional rule as well as Africa's voice in the global arena.*

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) *is Germany's oldest political foundation, promoting the values of social democracy, freedom, justice and solidarity, in its political advisory and education in its international work in over 100 countries. The FES AU Cooperation Office established in 2015 in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia coordinates Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's work with the African Union to promote social democracy, political dialogue, and research on African and international issues. Its mission is to strengthen the AU's visibility, support civic engagement, and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue between Africa and Europe on issues of political, social, and economic significance. The office also provides research, political analysis, and awareness-raising about AU resolutions and initiatives.*