

***Speech by Ambassador Christoph Retzlaff on the occasion of the opening of the 1st Kofi Annan Peace and Security Forum, Accra 4 September 2019***

**Your Excellency President of the Republic of Ghana**

**Former Presidents and Heads of States**

**Hon. Minister for Defense**

**Hon. Dep. Ministers**

**Mrs. Nane Annan**

**ECOWAS Comissioner**

**Special Representatives**

**Commander of the KAIPTC**

**Distinguished guests**

**It is an honor to be here with you today for the opening of the very first “Kofi Annan Peace and Security Forum”.**

**On behalf of the German Government, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to KAIPTC - as one of the key players for regional security - for this excellent initiative and for organizing this important event. I congratulate you on hosting a forum that I am sure is exactly in the spirit of the great Kofi Annan, who believed that peace is the most important and noble goal of mankind. Kofi Annan once stated that peace and security, development and human rights are three indispensable and mutually reinforcing pillars. This remains absolutely true.**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**this forum is taking place at a time when the security environment is changing in Africa- and especially in West Africa. New threats are emerging. You are all well aware of the growing challenges in the Sahel, the Lake Chad area, and the Gulf of Guinea. These developments are indeed reason for concern and they need a fast, strong and united answer from African states and the international community.**

**In the light of these challenges, Chancellor Merkel and President Macron just launched the Sahel-Initiative backed by all G7 states in Biarritz. This decision was taken in close consultation with the G5 Sahel.**

**Germany has also deployed its largest-to-date military contingent to the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali with more than 800 German soldiers. And we are proud of the German Army’s**

longstanding and successful cooperation with the Ghana Armed Forces. The same is true for our close partnership with KAIPTC since the Center's inception in 2004. And I should of course mention our support for the establishment of the ECOWAS Maritime Coordination Center in Accra in 2018.

Ladies and gentlemen,

much has been done in recent years to step up our readiness to deal with the challenge of violent extremism. However, international responses to these extremist groups have faced significant operational challenges. The efficiency of the G5 Sahel force for instance is challenged by the sustained operations of violent extremist groups across the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger

Not only that violent extremism can pose a direct threat to peacekeepers: We also witness how violent extremism can undermine peace processes and destabilize whole regions once thought to be peaceful.

The challenge is not only for peace operations to better protect themselves against violent extremism but to find ways of addressing it and preventing it from spreading.

Distinguished guests, let me briefly introduce three points for your consideration:

Firstly, violent extremism is a complex challenge. In order to tackle it, peace operations need to effectively link security with diplomacy, mediation, stabilization, development and human rights.

Stable political, economic, legal and social conditions are directly linked to peace and security. They are crucial in order to foster sustainable investments, sustainable development and sustainable employment in Africa. There is no development without security and there is no security without development.

And we should also keep in mind that strategies for addressing violent extremism cannot be separated from human rights, or else they will fail to reach their goal.

This brings me to my second point: Prevention is more effective and cost saving than countering violent extremism. We should therefore discuss what peace operations can do to prevent violent extremism from spreading.

Conflicts are incredibly costly once they have broken out – in human cost, developmental cost, not to mention the cost for containing, managing and (hopefully) ending the conflict.

This is why conflict prevention is a priority for Germany during our term at the UN Security Council.

Thirdly, I would like to emphasize that “regional cooperation” and “cross-border cooperation” are of crucial importance. They are not only useful in the field of security, but also in the fields of stabilization and development.

A critical role in addressing violent extremism is played by the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), holding a unique set of instruments to tackle peace and security challenges in Africa. Germany has been a close partner of the African Peace and Security Architecture including the African Union, ECOWAS and other regional organisations since its very beginnings.

We need more cooperation at all levels – from Addis to Abuja to Accra, from policy development to implementation mechanisms to training, from early warning to mediation to the stand-by force.

German commitment to supporting the African Peace and Security Architecture stems from our conviction that the continent and the region are best-placed to find lasting solutions to peace and security challenges in Africa. Our approach is very much thinking regional, respecting African ownership.

APSA has developed unique structures and capabilities, starting with its multidimensional standby force. However, peace operations are just one instrument, standing next to early warning mechanisms, as well as its capacities for mediation and preventive diplomacy.

All of these instruments are relevant when it comes to tackling violent extremism. However, they may need to be adapted to new challenges.

Distinguished guests,

To conclude I would like to underline that we need urgent and strong answers to the growing challenges for peace and security in West Africa and other regions of the continent. Germany is ready to continue to contribute to this endeavor.

There is no better place than here in Accra to discuss African peacekeeping and conflict prevention, early warning and national peace infrastructures, as Ghana is one of the leading contributors of peacekeepers in the world. I hope that Ghana and in particular the KAIPTC as hosts will share their rich experience. I am very much looking forward to the outcomes of this first “Kofi Annan Peace and Security Forum”.

Thank you for your attention.