1. In 2015, the African Union developed its plan to promote inclusion, improve development, security, good governance, and unity in its 53 member countries. This plan known as AU Plan 2063 sets a bold course for African leadership in the most pressing concerns of the continent and assume a more influential role in global affairs. To this end, HMG plays an important supportive role as outlined in the UK/AU Joint Communique on the African Union-United Kingdom Partnership. A strong and mutually beneficial relationship between the UK and the AU to achieve the goals of AU 2063 Agenda will benefit the citizens of the UK and AU member states alike.

2. Africa is growing. Since the wave of independence movements throughout the continent, there have been great strides in achieving governance and development goals across the continent. Despite the achievements made over the past decades, the progress envisioned as African countries assumed independence has not fully materialised. The continent is afflicted with chronic conflicts that span national boundaries, deep issues of corruption and under-performing government institutions, and burgeoning youth populations that are growing without clear prospects for success.

3. In this submission, Search for Common Ground (Search) will draw on over three decades of experience as practitioners on the ground in Africa to offer opportunities for HMG to support the African Union’s objectives. Search is the largest dedicated peacebuilding organisation in the world. Search has operated in over 35 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Search opened its doors in Africa in 1995, with the launch of Studio Ijambo in Burundi, founded in direct response to the role that the media played in the genocide in neighboring Rwanda. Today, Search implements civil society capacity building, social cohesion, security sector reform, early warning/early response, countering violent extremism, and women’s empowerment programming in 16 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our over 500 staff in Africa represent the ethnic and religious diversity of their countries and speak the predominant local languages.

4. HMG’s continued and increased investment in peacebuilding and the AU’s 2063 agenda is a critical way for the UK to promote and protect an equitable and inclusive rules-based international system that benefits both Africans and Brits alike and maintains HMG as a vital partner to African societies. As Africa continues its journey towards achieving its development objectives by the year 2063, it faces many challenges. Addressing these issues has the potential to catapult advances in the AU development agenda and build a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship between the people of the United Kingdom and the people living in countries across Africa. Over the next four decades there are four key transformational issues that will shape the AU’s ability to achieve its goals:

5. **Over-reliance on military and humanitarian solutions have left chronic conflicts to persist.**
6. Peacebuilding and conflict transformation measures benefit citizens of Africa and the United Kingdom alike. Over the past few decades, we have seen very few countries transition out of active conflict. Despite hundreds of millions of pounds, dollars, and euros invested in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and Nigeria, some of the most devastating violent conflicts persist. There is growing recognition that violent conflict is the largest barrier towards achieving the AU’s commitment to inclusive growth and sustainable development. Part of this problem is an over-reliance on responsive or militarised actions – the “bullets and band aids” approach to foreign policy. Traditional peacekeeping missions and humanitarian assistance remain the overwhelming expenditures of donor countries investing in conflict-affected contexts and they have undoubtedly contributed to the protection of civilians and the improvement of fragile situations. But it is impossible to look at ongoing violence in a place like Beni in the DRC today and believe that the situation is at the future envisioned twenty years ago when MONUC was first mandated. Many of the countries in Africa with peacekeeping operations 15 years ago, still have those same missions there today. There is a need to move away from reactive responses to conflict and move towards long-term, prevention-focused efforts.

7. The underlying drivers of conflict cannot be addressed by security or humanitarian solutions alone. In order to achieve a united and resilient continent there must be a whole-of-society approach that includes all relevant stakeholders. The integration of peacebuilding into humanitarian or development initiatives promotes resilience, conflict sensitivity, inclusion, and fosters social transformation that brings people together. Resilience is ultimately about the ability of communities to identify and mitigate challenges on their own. Humanitarian and development programmes should move beyond the provision of services but to build the capacities of communities to handle ongoing challenges in their communities. When humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors can work in harmony, that is where resilience will set in. The UK has funded improvements in this integration, including through the Yemen Conflict Sensitivity Platform in Yemen, and HMG should use lessons from this project to improve the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding (HDP) nexus in other areas where these actors coexist geographically, but are not collaborating or sharing expertise.

8. **Five conflict geographies in Africa undermine the objectives of the AU 2063 Agenda.**

9. Transnational challenges, such as climate change, migration, and arms flows, connect Africa and the United Kingdom and pose new challenges that threaten global stability. Conflicts are changing. The days of outright inter-state wars fought on-the-ground are decreasing. Other phenomena like global refugee crises, non-state armed groups, and civil wars are on the rise. People are also communicating in new ways that bring people together but also can tear them apart. These transnational challenges connect Africa and the United Kingdom in new ways – presenting both obstacles and opportunities. In order to address the multi-layered and overlapping drivers and consequences of conflict, it is important to look at
conflict systems, or “conflict geographies,” that create solutions based on the borders of the conflict, not of a map.

10. In Africa, there are five conflict geographies that undermine the AU’s security and development goals:
   - Non-state armed groups and increased militarisation in the Liptako-Gourma region (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso) and its effects throughout the Sahel;
   - Increasing instability in Nigeria and the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin region;
   - Social upheaval and civil war in the Sudans;
   - Decades of instability in the Great Lakes Region of Africa; and,
   - The al-Shabaab insurgency and its ripple effects along the Swahili Coast of East Africa.

11. Global concerns like climate change undermine all these conflicts and require the joint efforts of all countries to curb its effects. The repercussions of instability in these conflict geographies, such as migration and the flow of arms, reverberate across entire regions and have global implications. These transnational challenges require transnational buy-in and solutions.

12. Despite the chronic presence of violence in many places across Africa, it is important to recognise the growth and positive progress that have happened and facilitate the sharing of information across countries. Especially as it relates to seemingly intractable conflicts across the continent, shared learning is incredibly important. Kenya and Namibia’s experiences with community-based conservation to manage pastoralism challenges may be relevant to Nigeria, Mali, and others in West Africa dealing with destructive farmer-herder challenges. The role of media in shaping public opinion on recovery and reconstruction in war-torn Sierra Leone may be relevant to South Sudan and other seemingly intractable conflicts. The UK should look to see how they can support the exchange of best practices, shared solutions, and innovation across national borders – both through avenues such as the African Union and through non-state avenues.

13. **Institutions are failing to adapt to growing youth populations.**

14. African countries are struggling to adapt to the rapidly growing youth population. Over three quarters of Africa’s population is under the age of 35. While the demographics of the continent are changing, the institutions that govern these countries are struggling to adapt. Large youth populations or “youth bulges” does not mean higher levels of violence. However, this harmful narrative has prompted many governments to preemptively adopt repressive approaches in anticipation of youth dissent. Power is still largely held in the hands of political and economic elites. There is elite capture of peace processes and political position, which remain unrepresentative of the multitude of interests they are supposed to be representing.

15. Especially in situations of conflict, young people are seen only as part of the problem and not as part of the solution. Yet, young people across the continent are
already making critical contributions to preventing violence and building peace – both through securitised responses (e.g. vigilante groups) but also through direct humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding work. In Nigeria, youth have risked their lives to deliver humanitarian support in highly conflict-affected regions of the country. In DRC, youth create media programming and organise festivals to promote solidarity and reduce violence risks in the conflict-affected Ruzizi Plains.

16. It is important that the UK and AU support the individuals most likely to influence and drive change in their communities, especially when targeting youth populations. The UK should seek partners who have influence amongst their peers and communities, that are often overlooked in formal mechanisms for peace, governance, and development. Young people’s participation in peace is not just institutionalised, organised, or implemented in the form of “projects.” Youth leadership is found both within and outside of formal political institutions or youth organisations, and oftentimes are through informal movements of ideas that travel horizontally instead of hierarchical, top-down structures.

17. Despite their active role in peacebuilding, many youth have lost faith and trust in government and international actors who continue to treat youth as part of the problem, instead of partners for peace. In South Sudan, 67% of surveyed youth said they prefer non-violent methods to deal with conflict and are the most optimistic age group about peace in the country. Despite this readiness to promote peace, youth report continuous experiences and feelings of exclusion from key social, political, cultural, and economic aspects of their lives that inhibit their full participation. The tactics used by youth-led movements are sometimes seen as unpalatable for international support. Popular protests and social movements are important components of much youth-led work. Yet, these initiatives are often ignored or excluded by governments and international actors who may perceive these activities as potentially threatening or destabilizing. The UK can continue to protect safe and secure space for social movements to occur and recognise them as an important component of youth contributions to building and sustaining peace.

18. **Accepted social norms are radically shifting and they can be shaped.**

19. Social media has changed the ways in which people relate to one another. In many contexts across the continent, the destructive role of traditional and social media has been underscored. In places like Nigeria, DRC, CAR, and others, misinformation and incendiary hate speech solidify public support for violence against a particular group. The spread of these messages on apps like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp has been directly linked to violent attacks.

20. Despite the potential for media to act as an accelerant or catalyst for violence, it also can create space for dialogue, amplify marginalised voices, and transform social norms around peace and conflict. Artists and other creative content producers are key influencers in shaping what is considered acceptable social norms.
21. Fifteen years ago, the seemingly intractable civil war in Sierra Leone ended. Over 50,000 people had been killed, fighters remained active in the bush, and communities were traumatised and mistrustful. The potential for continued violence between communities remained high. However, media played an important role in shaping the public opinion on peace and conflict issues in the country. Radio programmes that amplified and discussed the experiences of everyday Sierra Leoneans across dividing lines shaped the issues that were discussed as priority in the reconciliation and recovery period. Youth trained to act as journalists in their communities shared the challenges and opportunities of the post-war period. These programmes transformed how Sierra Leoneans talked about peace and their use of civil society space to dictate the terms of the relationship between government and citizens. Of course, the road has not been easy, but it shows the transformative capacity of media to foster long-term social change. These programmes lasted over time and carved out a space for civil society and public opinion to shape the actions of politicians and the government. With DFID funding, Search used media again to shape norms and connect people to government in the lead-up to the 2018 elections. Last year, Search facilitated the first face-to-face presidential debate, which influenced the deliberation of more than 30% of interviewees vote.

22. There are few recommendations to the United Kingdom as it looks to improve its support to the African Union Plan 2063:

23. **Recommendation 1: Act locally but respond broadly to issues of violent conflict.** As the deliberative and action-oriented body of the African continent, the AU is well-placed to take a conflict geography approach to addressing root drivers of conflict and steer head the dedication and buy-in of national governments in its membership. The manifestation of conflict is unique to the places in which it occurs, and it is important that local actors with local knowledge and empowered and supported to drive change. At the same time, it is important to develop and maintain a focus on how to tackle the broader driving forces and consequences of conflict. The most consequential conflicts span national boundaries. By looking at the boundaries of conflict system, the UK and the AU will be better able to address cross-border issues, identify multi-layered approaches, and adapt programmes in accordance with dynamic conflict environments. Addressing the driving factors of conflict will require a cross-sectoral approach that brings together security, development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding actors; as well as, public and private partners to transform destabilizing conflicts across the continent.

24. **Recommendation 2: Place youth at the center of peace and security agenda.** As HMG looks to support the AU in its development goals, it has a critical role to play in addressing the exclusion of youth. HMG can prioritise partnerships and collaborative action where young people are viewed as equal and essential partners for peace. This includes debunking policy and programmatic approaches that are based on stereotypes. Youth should not be looked at as a group to be worked "for" or "on" but rather as partners endeavoring for a common goal of healthy, just, and safe societies.
25. Recommendation 3: Explore non-traditional methods of partnership and investment. Leadership is not defined by formal titles, but rather by ability to influence change. Often, non-traditional humanitarian and development partners, such as artists, online influencers, media creators, and religious actors, are most influential in shifting attitudes and behaviours. Social Impact Entertainment, creative use of social media, religious engagement and other approaches can amplify voices of marginalised communities and shift accepted and expected behaviours between groups and individuals. Funding allocated by HMG should also be adaptable to resource those actors with the most influence in communities.

HMG have been a world leader in investment in responsible and sustainable business practices abroad. HMG’s support for the Voluntary Principles of Security and Human Rights (VPs) in Madagascar and Angola helped to address communal tensions surrounding extractive industries. This not only had effects on the security situation in each country but promoted a more stable and hospitable environment for economic growth and investment. On the continent, there remain opportunities to further promote responsible mineral sourcing, such as cobalt mining in the DRC, oil extraction in Nigeria, or gold in South Sudan. There also are unique ways to underwrite risks to ensure sustainable investments “do more good” in communities and deepen partnerships between British and African people.

26. Recommendation 4: Invest in peer-to-peer learning. While many conflicts are highly localised there are unique opportunities for experience sharing amongst practitioners within and across conflict geographies. For example, conflicts between farmers and herders have been escalating rapidly across Africa’s Sahel, and different forms of strategies implemented in Kenya and Namibia may be helpful to adapt as societies deal with the transnational threats. The UK can use its decades of investment across the continent to draw lessons learned that sync with the objectives of the African Union. The UK can use its convening power at international level to support African convenings. These convenings can help bridge geographic and sectoral divides between academics, practitioners, and policymakers to improve multi-disciplinary research that links policy and practice.

27. Recommendation 5: Support artists and creative content producers who shape attitudes and behaviours. Sustainable peace in many contexts throughout Africa require profound shifts in the norms that govern social and public life, e.g. reconciliation or regeneration of the social contract. Media and creative outlets, such as art, dance, and music, can drive these changes when used to connect rather than divide. For example, youth-led radio talk shows in South Sudan drove conversations on issues of peace, conflict, and inter-ethnic relationships. After one year of programming, 78% of listeners were more likely to report trust in other ethnic groups. As HMG looks to support the AU to promote a peaceful, united, and resilient Africa, media can play an influential role in draining the enabling environment for violence and creating space for collaboration.

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