



American
Friends
Service
Committee



HORN OF AFRICA

EU Advocacy Week

Executive Summary

From December 8th to 12th, 2025, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) convened the Horn of Africa EU Advocacy Week in Brussels. This high-level initiative brought together a diverse delegation of 19 civil society and religious leaders from across the Horn of Africa. The primary objective was to foster a stronger, more principled partnership between the European Union and the region, moving beyond traditional aid paradigms towards a collaborative alliance for just and sustainable peace.

The delegation engaged with key EU institutions, including the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), presenting evidence-based, locally-produced research on critical issues. The core discussions focused on the catastrophic crisis in Sudan, the urgent need for meaningful inclusion of women and youth in peace processes, and the interconnected challenges of conflict, climate change, displacement, and hate speech.

The week was marked by powerful, firsthand testimonies that grounded policy discussions in the lived realities of communities across the Horn of Africa. A resounding takeaway was the collective call for the EU to move beyond rhetoric, leverage its political and economic influence to protect civilians, and directly resource local civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) that are the de facto first responders and architects of peace. The event successfully amplified African faith and civil society voices within European policy spaces, reinforced the role of AFSC and AACC as trusted advocates, and established a foundation for continued collaboration.

Strategic Context & Objectives

From December 8th to 12th, 2025, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) convened the Horn of Africa EU Advocacy Week in Brussels. This high-level initiative brought together a diverse delegation of 19 civil society and religious leaders from across the Horn of Africa. The primary objective was to foster a stronger, more principled partnership between the European Union and the region, moving beyond traditional aid paradigms towards a collaborative alliance for just and sustainable peace.

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Key Objectives

- **Amplify Local Voices:** To create a direct platform for civil society and religious leaders from the Horn of Africa to share their expertise, research, and lived experiences with EU policymakers.
- **Influence EU Policy:** To present concrete, evidence-based policy recommendations on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, transitional justice, and the inclusion of women and youth.
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** To build and solidify alliances between civil society in the Horn of Africa and EU institutions, fostering a relationship based on mutual respect and shared goals.
- **Promote a Just Peace in Sudan:** To urgently call for a ceasefire, a unified and inclusive mediation process, and accountability for atrocities, including the use of starvation and sexual violence as weapons of war.
- **Champion Meaningful Inclusion:** To move beyond tokenism and advocate for the structural inclusion of women, youth, and other marginalized groups at all levels of peace negotiations and decision-making.

Key Activities & Engagements

The Advocacy Week was structured around a series of high-level meetings and thematic roundtables, designed to maximize the delegation's impact on EU policy circles.

- Engagement at the European Parliament: Delegates met with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), including hosts Marco Tarquinio and Dario Nardella, for sessions like “Global Voices for Peace.” These meetings provided a formal setting to brief parliamentarians on the regional dynamics and urge for concrete parliamentary action.
- Dialogue at the European Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC): A pivotal session was held with ECOSOC representatives, including Stefano Palmieri and Luca Jahier, where the call for a stronger partnership between the Horn of Africa and Europe was the central theme. This engagement emphasized the need for a socio-economic approach to peacebuilding that includes civil society as a key pillar.
- Thematic Roundtables: In-depth discussions were held with EU policymakers and experts on specific issues. The most critical sessions, as detailed in the meeting notes, focused on:
 1. The Crisis in Sudan (Session I): A harrowing session dedicated to the atrocities, famine, and state collapse in Sudan.
 2. Women and Youth in Mediation and Peace Processes (Session II): A strategic discussion on the barriers and opportunities for the meaningful inclusion of women and youth, anchored in the UN Youth, Peace and Security agenda (UNSCR 2250)

Thematic Analysis & Key Takeaways

The discussions throughout the week coalesced around several interconnected themes, revealing the deep-seated challenges and opportunities in the region.

The Unfolding Catastrophe in Sudan: A Call to Halt Genocide

Sudan dominated the advocacy agenda, with delegates painting a stark picture of a nation in freefall. The testimonies were a stark reminder of the human cost of inaction.

- **Weaponization of Basic Needs:** Starvation and sexual violence are not merely consequences of the war but are actively used as weapons. As one delegate from AFSC's research relayed, a mother in West Darfur stated, "We need the guns to stop so the food can come through." The delegation detailed horrific accounts of racialized sexual violence, gang rape, and survivors too traumatized to face their communities. The message was clear: "The people in Sudan need trauma healing just like they need food and water!" (Zaina Kisongoa).
- **The Failure of Mediation and External Actors:** A major point of contention was the exclusion of Sudanese civilians from peace talks. Delegates decried that "the world is negotiating in too many rooms and Sudanese are not in enough of them." There was a direct call to hold the United Arab Emirates accountable for its alleged role in funding the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which delegates labeled as funding a genocide. The EU was urged to use its influence to streamline mediation and ensure it is grounded in civilian leadership, not the same military actors perpetrating violence.
- **The Collapse of the State and the Rise of Local Resilience:** With the state in collapse, women-led organizations and faith based groups have become the de facto government, providing food, health clinics, education, and psycho-social support. The delegation emphasized that the EU must recognize and directly resource these local, frontline actors, as "resilience alone cannot stop genocide."

The Imperative of Meaningful Inclusion: Beyond Tokenism

A central theme was the critique of how women and youth are currently included in peace processes, often as tokens rather than as genuine partners.

- **Women as Peacebuilders, Excluded from Peace Tables:** The story of “Miriam”, a woman who did many things to build peace before mediation but was excluded from formal negotiations, encapsulated the experience of countless women. The EU was called upon to use its leverage, such as through partnership agreements, to guarantee women’s meaningful participation at the table and to protect the civic space that women human rights defenders need to operate.
- **The Generational Chasm:** The stark contrast between Africa’s leaders (average age 70) and its population (median age 20) was highlighted as a fundamental structural problem. A youth delegate from South Sudan shared the difficult choice of refusing to join armed groups and the importance of building the capacity of young people for peace. The call was to move beyond tokenistic representation to institutionalize youth participation through mechanisms like youth advisory boards and by addressing the structural barriers they face, such as unemployment. As one participant noted, “only creditable transformation will come from youth who reject violence and tribalism.”

The EU’s Role: From Partner to Ally

The delegation consistently framed their asks not as requests for charity, but as a call for a mature, principled alliance.

- **Leveraging Influence for Protection:** The EU was urged to use its considerable political and economic influence to create political conditions for justice. This includes imposing and enforcing stronger arms embargos, stemming the flow of money fueling conflicts, and using diplomatic channels to protect civilians. As one delegate stated, “History will remember that Europe chose to stand with the people and not the logic of war.”
- **Acknowledging a Moral Obligation:** A powerful intervention reminded the EU of its moral obligation because of its history of colonization to rectify some of the mistakes from that period.” This reframes EU engagement not as optional benevolence but as a responsibility rooted in shared history.
- **Moving to Action and Alliance:** An EU host themselves expressed frustration with decades of discussion, stating, “I’m really fed up with all this discussion, time to pass to action.” This sentiment was echoed by another who called for Europe to move past the notion of partnership to alliances, recognizing the mutual interest in a stable and prosperous Africa, given Europe’s demographic trends and Africa’s youthful dynamism.

Key Asks to the EU

In the events at the Economic and Social Committee, the European Parliament, and in thematic roundtables with EU policy makers, CSOs representatives and experts, the delegates presented evidence-based, locally produced research on the Horn of Africa on issues ranging from ending ongoing conflicts, promoting inclusive peacebuilding with women and youth, supporting transitional justice, addressing the refugee crisis, combating hate speech, and highlighting the link between climate change and conflict.

Following these exchanges, the delegates from the Horn of Africa recommended key entry points for the EU support towards sustainable peace and stability in the Horn as follows:

- *Preventing arms sales from the EU and other allies to the region, especially in Sudan.*
- *Work for a complete ceasefire and humanitarian corridors.*
- *Shape a survivors-centered humanitarian support system, including lifting restrictions on family reunifications.*
- *Invest in capacity building on mediation and conflict resolution.*
- *Invest in entrepreneurship programs, including those for IDPs and refugees.*
- *Prioritizing women's participation in peacebuilding processes, making gender inclusion a precondition for partnership and funding and addressing gender-based violence.*
- *Investing in agriculture, and most especially helping the region face the impact of climate change.*
- *Invest in education.*
- *Invest in trauma healing both at community level and at the level of national level policies.*
- *Support the civic space, including by harnessing youth platforms, support CSO's capacity building, digital literacy and fact checking abilities.*
- *Continue using its diplomatic leverage to push governments to put in place laws and policies on implementing TJ Mechanisms.*

These actors went back to their respective countries with more conviction that the EU remains one of the key allies that can change the narrative in the Horn of Africa by divesting from armed conflicts to focusing more on peace and development.

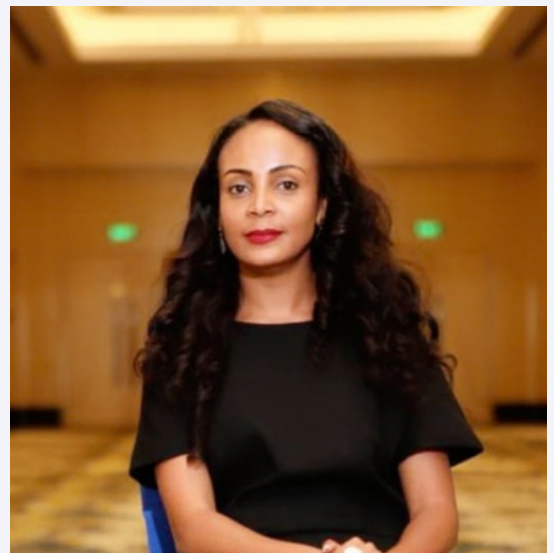
Voices from the Delegation

Personal Reflections

The impact of the week was profound on the participants themselves, as reflected in their personal takeaways. Their words capture the spirit of the mission:

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The advocacy mission in Brussels was a deeply meaningful experience. It provided a rare opportunity to bring regional realities directly into international policy spaces. Listening to and learning from the diverse experiences of colleagues has strengthened my appreciation for collective advocacy.



LENSA BIYENA GELETA

Ethiopian Mediation And Arbitration Center

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We are not alone; the global actors are still thinking about the Horn of Africa. There is a strategic opportunity for the EU action as it is well-positioned to play a catalytic role in advancing youth inclusion.



YOAL GATKUOTH RIEK YAHT

Pan-African Peacemakers Alliance (PAPA)

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Transitional Justice is not a policy exercise or a report writing process; it is a lifeline to survivors. Justice in the Horn of Africa will be delivered when survivors shape the mechanisms that determine truth, accountability, and repair.



MESUD RETA

Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO)

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Sudan needs a ceasefire now. Gender based violence against women and girls has been normalized in Sudan as a weapon of war and the world must listen to the cries of the women of Sudan.

EUNICE MUTHONI

Conclusions & Outcomes

The Salama Hub EU Advocacy Week successfully transformed a diverse group of regional leaders into a unified, powerful voice in the heart of Europe. The delegation did not merely present problems; they offered locally-grounded analysis and clear, actionable policy recommendations.

The key outcomes include:

- **Elevated Visibility:** Successfully brought the multifaceted crises of the Horn of Africa, particularly the genocide in Sudan, to the forefront of discussions in the European Parliament and ECOSOC.
- **Strengthened Networks:** Forged stronger ties among CSOs from across the region and between these organizations and EU policymakers.
- **Concrete Asks:** Delivered a clear set of demands, including a call for an immediate ceasefire in Sudan, accountability for perpetrators, direct funding for local women and youth-led organizations, and the structural inclusion of these groups in all peace processes.
- **A Foundation for the Future:** Established AFSC and AACC as key conveners and trusted partners for the EU in promoting a just and sustainable peace in the Horn of Africa, ensuring that the dialogue initiated in Brussels will continue to resonate in policy and practice.

Annexes





