

Assessment of implementation of the PSC work plans 2020-2021: achievements, challenges and way forward

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Tomorrow (19 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to convene its 1039th session to assess the implementation of its work plans for 2020 to 2021. The assessment is aimed at reflecting on Council's achievements, its challenges and ways forward in undertaking its works. In addition, Council may also consider the report of the technical early response mission to Comoros at tomorrow's session.

Following the opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the AU, Alfredo Nuvunga, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a statement.

The indicative annual programme of activities for the years 2020 and 2021 would both suggest that while Council has been able to conduct significant number of its planned activities for these years, there is still substantial backlog of undertakings that were not completed within Council's anticipated timeline or at the predetermined frequency. Tomorrow's session presents Council the opportunity to reflect on the underlying reasons for the presence of a gap between its plan of activities and their implementation, and to discuss approaches for resolving the challenges faced in that regard.

In terms of sessions that were planned to take place during

2020, most of the country specific ones were successfully convened within the year despite extraordinary circumstances due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and resulting changes to Council's working methods. On the other hand, there was considerable gap in the convening of thematic sessions that were included in the annual plan of 2020. While some of these thematic sessions were not convened altogether, some did not take place at the planned frequency. For instance, the annual indicative plan included a session dedicated to climate change, which did not take place throughout the year. Similarly, Council planned to have a consultative meeting with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and another one with the Pan-African Parliament, both of which were not convened. A briefing by the Panel of the Wise, to take place twice within the year and every six months was another one of Council's plans for 2020, which was not implemented.

Regarding the frequency of planned sessions, one example is Council's plan to receive briefings on elections in Africa every three months, making the projected briefings on the topic four. However, only one briefing session was convened during the year on elections in Africa. Another example is Council's plan to review post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) efforts in the Continent, twice within the year, although only one session was dedicated to the theme. Similarly, while Council was planned to receive once every three months, a briefing from the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services (CISSA) on terrorism and violent extremism in the continent, two sessions were committed to the theme itself and neither one was a briefing by CISSA. Other thematic topics such as 'women, peace and security', 'children affected by armed conflicts' and 'plight of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)' which form part of Council's standing agenda items were on the other hand successfully convened at the planned regularity.

In addition to the sessions planned for 2020, Council was also

unable to carry out some of its regular activities, principally the induction of new PSC members and carrying out field missions. While four field visits were planned to take place to conflict affected AU member States within the year, only one field mission – to South Sudan – was conducted. It is also to be recalled that Council did not develop programme of work or assign official chairs for the months of August and December 2020.

Council's annual indicative plan for 2021 has been largely similar to that of 2020's with a few changes such as the plan to convene two sessions on children affected by armed conflicts (only one session was dedicated for that theme in 2020). So far into the year, Council has been able to convene multiple sessions, which were included in its yearly indicative programme, as well as some, which were introduced in its monthly programmes due to developing changes in the continent's peace and security landscape. It has also been clear that the current year has shown progress in terms of achieving implementation of Council's planned activities, as compared to 2020. For example, Council has been able to consider AU Commission Chairperson's reports on elections in Africa twice already and has also convened a session on the impacts of Covid-19 on elections on the continent. This comes closer to meeting its projected plan of convening a session on that theme once every three months. Moreover, Council has also been able to convene its 13th retreat during the year in addition to conducting field visits to three countries (Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and Sudan) as well as a fact-finding mission to Chad and its evaluation mission to Mali. Predictably, Council's ability to adopt to its new working mechanisms developed in response to Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to its ability to better implement its planned annual activities in 2021. In addition, Council's 2020 programme was more or less seized with sessions on the novel Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on peace and security in Africa, making it difficult to maintain the original plan

of activities.

While the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has seriously impeded the implementation of Council's programmes according to plan, there were also other contributing institutional issues which continue to impose challenges to the successful implementation of the Council's work plans. Among these and perhaps a primary one is the shortage of human, financial and material capacity. Activities such as field missions and visits to conflict affected AU member States as well as the day-to-day activities of the PSC Secretariat and the regular meetings of Council members require considerable resources. Overcoming these challenges will require commitment from member states to make adequate contributions to enable the Council carryout all of its activities.

Another challenge which was also observed in PSC's 2020 Activities Report – submitted to the AU Assembly's 33rd Ordinary Session of February 2020 – is the lack of eligible, accredited ambassadors of PSC member States. Despite the requirement under Rule 18 of the PSC Rules of Procedure for each member state of the PSC to be represented at Council meetings by accredited representatives, this hasn't always been the case. As the 2020 Activities Report indicates, of the fifteen PSC member States, five had no representatives. The appointment of ambassadors at the AU Headquarter to take part in Council's activities including undertaking the rotational task of chairing the Council and drafting monthly programmes is not only a requirement but also essential for the smooth functioning of the PSC.

The current year has also shown that despite progress obtained in Council's efforts to address conflict situations on the continent, there have also been cases of regress and outbreak of new conflicts. In relation to that, certain crises and conflict situations did not feature in the Council's agenda.

On the other hand, the changing landscape of peace and

security, mainly the clear resurgence of coups in Africa during 2021 has also meant that Council had to accommodate emerging situations in its work plan. These challenges notwithstanding, Council has been able to manage most of its planned activities for the current year so far. However, the experience has been an opportunity to reflect on the timeliness of early warning and early action. This will assist not only in identifying and averting possibilities of crisis and conflicts, it will also contribute to the PSC's ability to prepare on how it may respond to such situations more quickly and effectively.

The new structure of the AU Commission particularly the merger of the Peace and Security Department and the Department of Political Affairs, leading to the formation of the new PAPS Department presents a new policy environment. It is therefore important to reflect on such changes and their implication on the mandate and work of the PSC. With the current increased engagement between AU and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), it is also important to reflect on policy coordination towards more effective response and management to conflicts.

The outcome of tomorrow's session is unknown at the time of drafting this insight. Council may reflect on the challenges including the ones identified above and discuss the practical steps to address such challenges. It may call on AU member states and partners to consolidate their support and collaboration with the PSC. Council may particularly emphasise the importance of strict application of Article 5(h) of the PSC Protocol in the selection of PSC member States in order to ensure that elected members are fully capable of shouldering the responsibilities entailed by membership to the Council. It may call on member states and the AU to support its work. It may also underscore the importance of policy harmonization and coordination of efforts between the PSC and the various AU mechanisms and policy organs, which contribute, to the

maintenance of peace and security including the RECs/RMs. Council may also recall and recommit to the agreements listed under section III of the Conclusions of its 13th Retreat (Mombasa Retreat) relating to challenges on compliance to PSC instruments and the ways forward in addressing these.