

AU-UN briefing on joint field visits to the CAR and Sudan (Darfur)

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Tomorrow (10 October 2019) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to receive a briefing from Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. The two senior officials are expected to provide updates on the political and security developments in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the situation in Sudan, particularly as it relates to the joint UN-AU Mission to Darfur (UNAMID).

The briefing by Chergui and Lacroix follows the joint visit to the CAR and Sudan. The joint visit to the CAR, where the AU leads the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR and the UN runs a mission, took place from 4 to 7 October 2019 and involved, apart from Chergui and Lacroix, Koen Vervaeke, Director General for Africa of the European Union External Action Service. This mission follows another joint mission that Chergui and Lacroix undertook to the CAR in April 2019. It aimed at reviewing progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, signed on 6 February 2019 following negotiations in Khartoum Sudan that Chergui facilitated.

During the visit, the mission met with Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the CAR and Firmin Ngrebada, Prime Minister of the CAR. The mission also held discussions with political party leaders, civil society organizations and representatives of diplomatic missions and regional and international organizations. It also received briefings from

the civilian and military leaders of the field offices of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

The joint field mission learned that progress has been made in the effort to restore state authority in the CAR. These include the establishment of all Prefects in the 16 prefectures, majority of sub-prefects, the Technical Safety Committees, Prefectural Implementation Committees and the slow but progressive deployment of the Defense and Security Forces. In his address at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) annual general debate on 29 September, President Touadera told the members of the UN that progress made in the implementation of the peace agreement is modest.

The joint visit also came against the background of continuing violations and fragility of the February agreement. As President Touadera pointed out in his UNGA address CAR remains fragile with armed groups continuing 'to supply war materials and ammunition illegally' and committing 'massive and repeated violations of international humanitarian and human rights law'. In one of the major incidents of violations on 21 May, one of the armed rebel groups 3R ((Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation) engaged in armed attacks against civilians killing at least 42 people. In the briefing to the UN Security Council (UNSC) on 20 June, the UNSC was informed that 'every week, 50 to 70 violations of the peace agreement are reported, committed mainly by armed groups against civilians. Violence against civilians, illegal taxation, the obstruction of the deployment of State authority and the occupation of public buildings continue and are a source of deep frustration for the people of the Central African Republic.'

The press statement issued at the end of the joint mission 'expressed concern over the continuing hostile acts in the country'. The mission also condemned 'the clashes between armed groups in Birao [...] resulting in the displacement of more than 15,000 people' and 'the persistence of violations of

the Peace Agreement and human rights in other parts of the country, particularly in the northwest in the recent period.'

As the implementation process thus far demonstrated, the foremost challenge facing the agreement relates to the implementation of the security provisions. It would be of particular interest for PSC members on the mission's assessment of the major issues for the implementation of the security provisions and steps to be taken for addressing them. Also, of interest is how to reduce and eventually put an end to all forms of violence in the CAR, particularly violence targeting civilians.

Following the visit to the CAR, Chergui and Lacroix have also been on a joint field visit to Sudan with a focus on the joint UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). As with the visit to the CAR, this mission also followed the joint mission that the two senior AU and UN officials undertook to Darfur, Sudan in April 2019. This joint field mission came after the formation of the new transitional government of Sudan headed by the Sovereign Council and Prime Minister Abdela Hamdok and ahead of the renewal by the UNSC of the mandate of UNAMID before its expiry on 31 October. It is to be recalled that the PSC renewed UNAMID's mandate for a further period of one- year last June.

The joint mission has been undertaken for a period of two days during 8 and 9 October. The visit focused on various issues relating to UNAMID including the drawdown of the mission, planning for a transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, next steps for the Darfur peace process, and post-UNAMID engagement. During the mission, Chergui and Lacroix together with the representatives of the Government of Sudan held the 27th meeting of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism on UNAMID in Khartoum on 8 October. This focused on assessing UNAMID's operations and the progress in the drawdown of UNAMID.

Chergui and Lacroix also travelled to El Fahser, Darfur. They

interacted with Sudan officials, women's groups and UNAMID officials focusing on issues requiring attention for consolidation of peace in Darfur, particularly in the context of the planned exit of UNAMID and the transition to peacebuilding. They have been informed from the leadership of North Darfur Major General Malik Al-Tayeb that the priority issues for the region include reconciliation and reconstruction works including those necessary for provision of social services such as health and education. During their meeting with Darfur Women's Protection Network, various issues affecting women have been highlighted. One of the issues they raised which is of particular importance within the framework of UNSC Resolution 1325 was the participation of women in the Darfur peace process.

The visit also covers meetings with the authorities in Khartoum taking place on 9 October. Apart from the process of the exit of UNAMID, issues for discussion with the new transitional government included responsible handing over of responsibilities to Sudan authorities and the UN country team, peacebuilding needs for consolidating peace in Darfur and post-UNAMID engagement.

Head of new government, Prime Minister Abdela Hamdok highlighted the achievement of peace in Sudan as one of the priorities of his government and to this end he initiated a process for engaging the various armed groups in Sudan, including those in Darfur. On 11 September, after talks facilitated by South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, Sudan government and Sudanese armed opposition groups signed roadmap for peace called 'The Juba Declaration of Confidence Building Measures and the Preparation for Negotiation.' During a visit to France, PM Hamdok met with the Sudan Liberation Army leader Abdel Wahid al Nur on 29 September in an effort to encourage the SLA leader to join the peace effort under the new political environment in Sudan.

While the negotiated power-sharing agreement of 17 August that

led to the formation of the new transitional government in Sudan and its peace efforts are welcome developments, it would be of interest to PSC members to learn from Chergui and Lacroix whether there is a need for making any adjustment to the UNAMID exit plan in the light of the changes in Sudan. In the communique of its 856th session, the PSC stated that 'UNAMID exit should not create a vacuum and expose the long-suffering civilian population to renewed risks.'

At the timing of going to press, the outcome of the briefing session was unknown. In respect of the CAR, it is particularly important for the AU, UN and EU to mobilize coordinated and sustained in country engagement targeting in particular the 14 rebel groups parties to the peace agreement and help in putting in place mechanisms to support local reconciliation efforts and to leverage the influence of neighboring countries particularly Chad and Sudan for compliance of armed groups with the peace agreement. As far as Sudan is concerned, apart from the assessment on the various issues highlighted above, there is expectation for identifying clear roadmap on the options to be pursued in supporting the peace process in Darfur and importantly the form that the AU-UN engagement may take upon the departure of UNAMID.