

Brief on mediation and reconciliation in conflict resolution in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

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Tomorrow (15 July), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will discuss the role of mediation and reconciliation in resolving the conflict in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), focusing on the Nairobi and Luanda Processes—regional peace initiatives under the auspices of the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), respectively.

The session commences with an opening remark from Tete Antonio, Minister of External Relations of the Republic of Angola and Chairperson of the PSC at the Ministerial Level. This is followed by a statement by Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). DRC, as the concerned country, may also make an intervention. The representatives of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), ICGLR, EAC and the United Nations (UN) may also deliver statements.

The last time the PSC met on the situation in Eastern DRC at its 1203rd session, it PSC highlighted the importance of the diplomatic efforts embodied in the Nairobi and Luanda processes. These processes are ongoing regional initiatives under the auspices of the EAC and the ICGLR. The Nairobi Process aims to mediate a resolution between the Government of

the DRC and various armed groups active in the eastern regions of the country. Concurrently, the Luanda Process seeks to address the inter-state dimension of the crises in the Eastern DRC through dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda. Considering the persistence of the fighting involving the M23 and the fact that both the Nairobi and Luanda processes are stalled, the PSC, apart from receiving updates on the state of the conflict and the peace efforts, faces the challenge of how to overcome the impediments to the two peace processes.

On the security front, the conflict involving the M23 continues to rage on and expand. The M23 is not only deepening its territorial control in North Kivu but also moving towards South Kivu province. Since the last PSC session in March, the M23 came closer to the town of Seke some 27 kilometres from the strategic and regional capital, Goma before abandoning the area. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Head of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita told the UN Security Council (UNSC) in a briefing on 8 July that 'the M23 captured several strategic locations in North Kivu, burning several FARDC bases and triggering additional population displacements.' On 29 June it captured Kanyabayonga, a strategic town that connects major commercial centres in North Kivu. In the context of the escalating fighting, it was reported that two South African soldiers died and 20 were injured when the M23 attacked the town of Seke at the end of last month. Beyond the fighting between FARDC and the M23, other domestic and foreign armed groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO), the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), Red Tabara, and Mai-Mai also continue to wreak havoc in the region, significantly impacting the civilian population.

Apart from expressing concern about the territorial expansion of the M23 in North Kivu and its spillover into South Kivu, the head of MONUSCO warned in the 8 July briefing to the UNSC

that 'the rapidly escalating M23 crisis carries the very real risk of provoking a wider regional conflict.' Instead of the gaps between DRC and Rwanda narrowing down, the tension between the two countries is deepening with escalatory rhetoric and trading of accusations. During the 8 July UNSC briefing the representative of the DRC held that 'the deployment of Rwandan soldiers on the territory of the DRC, as well as Rwanda's alliance with the M23 terrorist group to destabilise the country, constitute severe violations of the Charter of the United Nations.' With a hint of unfulfilled expectations from the international community, the DRC representative noted that '[i]t appears that Rwanda has been guaranteed impunity and enjoys a blank cheque' and called for a change of course by urging action against Rwanda. For the Rwanda representative, the 'security and governance failures of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he said, have led to the mushrooming of more than 250 illegal armed groups, chief among them the FDLR.' The Rwandan representative asserted that Congolese Tutsi populations are being ethnically cleansed by armed groups, hinting it as a source of the fighting (involving M23). The DRC representative asserted that 'any discussion will be difficult' as long as Rwanda forces remain in Congolese territory.

In terms of the humanitarian consequences of the conflicts, the UN reports that about 7 million are displaced in eastern DRC. MONUSCO's chief described the situation as 'one of the most severe, complex and neglected humanitarian crises of our times.' Expressing their alarm about the deteriorating security situation in the Kivus and Itury and its humanitarian implications, in a joint statement to the 8 July UNSC briefing, the African 3 plus members of the UNSC (A3+) stated that they are 'especially concerned about the protection of civilians risks posed by this problem.'

While no major breakthrough has been achieved with respect to the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes, the US working in

concert with Angola brokered a two-week humanitarian truce that commenced on 5 July 2023. According to a [statement](#) by the US, the 'truce commits the parties to the conflict to silence their weapons, allow for the voluntary return of displaced people, and provide humanitarian personnel unfettered access to vulnerable populations. The truce covers areas of hostilities most affecting civilian populations.' It further stated that the DRC and Rwanda governments have expressed support for the truce despite putting conditions for a broader de-escalation. Following their retreat in Zanzibar on 6-8 July, the Foreign Ministers of the EAC called for the indefinite extension of the truce.

Apart from the unwillingness of the DRC government to talk to the M23, the Nairobi process was further complicated by tensions between the DRC and Kenya following a press conference in Nairobi in December 2023, where a new Congolese political coalition known as the Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC), reportedly including several armed groups such as the M23, was announced. With the formation of the new AFC coalition, the M23 also expressed unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the Congolese government. On 7 June, the EAC held an extraordinary virtual summit to discuss, among other things, the strained relations between some of its member states. During the meeting, Rwandan President Paul Kagame requested an in-person EAC summit as soon as possible. DRC President Félix Tshisekedi did not attend the EAC virtual summit, signalling his dissatisfaction with comments made by Kenyan President William Ruto in a 22 May interview with Jeune Afrique, where Ruto stated that the M23 is a Congolese issue, not a Rwandan one. Nevertheless, following the decisions of the 7 June extraordinary virtual summit, EAC ministers held a retreat in Zanzibar on 8 July to discuss inter-state relations within the EAC and their adverse effects on the regional integration agenda. At this meeting, the Congolese and Rwandan ministers agreed to meet soon within the framework of the Luanda process. Underscoring a political process as the viable path

to sustainable peace and security in eastern DRC, the EAC ministers in their communiqué recommended 'the convening of a summit of the EAC to revitalise the political track of the EAC led Nairobi process in reciprocal coordination with the Luanda process.'

Under the Luanda process, apart from the role that Angola played towards the humanitarian truce that the US brokered between the warring parties in Eastern DRC and following the mini-summit that Angolan President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço convened on the sidelines of the AU summit that ended without success after bitter exchanges, Lourenço held bilateral meetings with Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame on 17 February 2024. He continued his diplomatic engagement in Luanda, meeting with the two leaders on 27 February and 11 March 2024, during which they reportedly agreed, in principle, to meet for direct talks. However, this meeting has yet to take place.

On the military track, following the replacement of the EAC forces by SADC Mission to DRC (SAMIDRC), it is to be recalled that the PSC, at its 4 March 2024 session, endorsed the deployment of SAMIDRC and requested the UNSC to support SAMIDRC, despite opposition from Rwanda which considers SAMIDRC as a force taking side with FARDC. The Security Council is expected to discuss possible support for SAMIDRC based on the Secretary-General's letter submitted on 28 June 2024, which outlines options for the Council's consideration. These options include information sharing and technical assistance to enhance coordination and deconfliction; limited use of the UN's logistical assets and capabilities; and comprehensive UN support. During the Security Council's 8 July 2024 meeting on the situation in DRC, some members ruled out the possibility of applying the third option and emphasised the need to find a political solution through the existing regional peace initiatives under the Nairobi and Luanda processes.

A related issue to note is the proliferation of regional initiatives, highlighting the need for enhanced coordination and harmonisation. To address this, the AU initiated the quadripartite process, involving the EAC, ECCAS, ICGLR, and SADC. The first quadripartite summit held on 27 June 2023, agreed on a joint framework to promote coherence among the initiatives of the four regional mechanisms, with a clear division of responsibilities and timelines. In its March communiqué, the PSC requested the AU Commission to convene a second quadripartite summit to follow up on the implementation of commitments made during the first summit. It is anticipated that the Commission will update the PSC on preparations for this upcoming summit.

Additionally, there is an ongoing discussion on the revitalisation of the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region (PSC-F), ten years after its signing in Addis Ababa, in light of the escalating security situation in eastern DRC and its implications for the peace and stability of the Great Lakes region. This discussion is taking place in line with the decision of the 11th Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM)—the body overseeing the implementation of the PSC-F—held in Burundi in May 2023. The next ROM meeting, to be hosted by Uganda this year, is expected to consider the recommendations of an independent assessment report on the revitalisation of the PSC-F.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. The PSC is expected to express concern over the escalating insecurity in the eastern DRC. It may condemn the violence targeting civilians, MONUSCO and that which led to the death of SMIDRC soldiers from South Africa. It may reiterate its earlier assertion that there is no military solution to the conflict and welcome the decision of the EAC ministers for the revitalisation of the political process. Commending Angola's role under the Luanda process, the PSC may also seize the opportunity to welcome the humanitarian truce that the

conflict parties agreed to early this month and endorse the call of the EAC ministers for the indefinite extension of the humanitarian truce beyond the two-week period expected to expire on 19 July. In light of the growing danger of the situation spilling into a regional war, the PSC may call for an exercise of utmost restraint, respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the DRC and guarantee for the internal security of Rwanda. The PSC may encourage the EAC and the SADC to encourage Rwanda and DRC to build on their support for the humanitarian truce and engage in the Nairobi and Luanda processes with a higher sense of responsibility and commitment for achieving wider de-escalation. The PSC may also reiterate the importance of the revitalisation of the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region including through the adoption of measures such as a continental peace operation that ensure confidence and trust through ensuring territorial integrity and sovereignty of DRC and security of Rwanda on the basis of political agreement for the resolution of the fighting in the eastern DRC on the basis of the Nairobi and Luanda processes. To this end, the PSC may request the AU Commission in consultation with EAC, SADC and ICGLR to explore and present options for an AU-led continental monitoring and supporting mission.