

Briefing by CISSA on the Peace and Security Outlook on the Continent for the Year 2023

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Tomorrow (8 February) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold its 1138th session to receive a briefing on the peace and security outlook on the continent for the year 2023.

The session commences with the opening remark of Edward Xolisa Edward, Permanent Representative of South Africa and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of February. The AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make statement presenting reflections from the PAPS department on the peace and security outlook of the continent. The main briefing on the theme of the session is expected to be delivered by a representative of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Service of Africa (CISSA).

Tomorrow's session is taking place in line with PSC's decision adopted at its 1073rd session held on 6 April 2022 that requested the Commission to facilitate quarterly briefings to enhance conflict prevention. In line with this decision, the PSC in its annual indicative program of activities for 2023 has scheduled to receive such briefings in February, June, October and December.

When the PSC convened its 1073rd session on the same theme, it expressed grave concern over the 'persistence of a myriad of

threat to peace, security and stability and socio-economic development on the continent.’ In the session, a number of security threats were highlighted including political instability and electoral disputes, unconstitutional changes of government, human rights violation, violent extremism and terrorism and cybercrime.

During tomorrow’s session, the briefing by CISSA may highlight the continuation or worsening of the security threats that were witnessed in 2022. The first of such threat that is sure to receive particular attention is the persistence of conflicts involving terrorist groups and the threat of their expansion into new areas. In terms of the persistence of conflicts involving terrorism, various parts of the continent experienced more incidents of violence in 2022. Out of the 699 terrorist attacks that the African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) documented for the first half of 2022, the Sahel region recorded 179 attacks that resulted in 1,909 deaths while the Lake Chad Basin recorded 153 attacks that caused 1,229 deaths. On the other hand, the Great Lakes region accounted for 96 attacks and 1,013 deaths, and Horn of Africa region accounted for 71 attacks that resulted in 504 deaths during the period. According to the latest report from United Nations (UN) Development Programme (UNDP) on the spread of terrorism, human rights violations and abuses have become triggers of instability including in relation to the emergence and expansion of conflicts involving terrorism.

In terms of the threat of expansion of conflicts involving terrorist groups, the most worrying is the threat of expansion of conflicts involving terrorism from the Sahel to the littoral states of West Africa. In this respect, Ghana’s President [warned](#) in a meeting last November that the ‘worsening situation ...threatens to engulf the entire West Africa’.

The other major source of threat to peace and security on the continent is the worsening of democratic governance deficit on

the continent and the discontent and grievances this continues to breed. In countries that have not experienced change of leadership or have been dominated by one party for a long period of time, the worsening of the democratic governance deficit in the context of expanding socio-economic challenges is sure to become a fertile ground for political instability. These may take various forms including mass protests, riots and in worst case scenario, the emergence of armed militias or insurgent groups.

On the socio-economic sources of threat in 2023, attention may be drawn to the fact that the vast majority of the 50 countries in the world that are at risk of debt crisis are in Africa. This debt crisis is compounded by high levels of inflation and fast-growing rise in the price of consumer goods, including basic necessities, with the IMF reporting that consumer prices have increased in Africa by more than 20 percent on average in 2022. These severe economic pressures can have dire consequences in terms of stability not only for fragile and conflict affected countries on the continent but also for those less fragile and not affected by conflict. Accordingly, one aspect of the peace and security outlook of the continent for 2023 that requires proactive policy action relate to the threats of instability that arises from these dire socio-economic trends.

Another site of threat to stability and peace in Africa in 2023, as in the past years, involves elections. Close to twenty countries will be holding presidential, parliamentary and local elections in 2023. Some of the countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Guinea Bissau, will be holding their elections in fragile political and security contexts. In others countries, such as Madagascar, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, trust deficit in electoral institutions and processes combined with disinformation and rising cost of living and food insecurity could create flashpoints for electoral dispute and violence taking various forms including

political protests, mass demonstrations, strikes and riots which are met with heavy-handed responses by security forces.

Source: Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EiSA) and Amani Africa Tracking

Developments in 2022 also suggest that the management of complex political transitions, peace processes and conflict hot spots will continue to be sites of geopolitical rivalry that in some cases may lead to reversal of progress towards resolution. As the influence and meddling of external actors on the continent intensifies in 2023, existing geopolitical rivalries over transitions and conflict settings such as in Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Libya and Sudan are expected to persist and such rivalries could become prominent in others such as the DRC. An important consideration for the PSC in the attempt to prevent relapse of transitions into conflict or crisis or further deterioration of existing conflicts due to the impact of geopolitical rivalries, is the question of the measures that should be devised and implemented to mitigate to the minimum possible, the adverse impact of such deepening geopolitical rivalry on Africa.

Aside from the impact of geopolitical rivalry, tomorrow's session may focus on the challenges around protracted and complex political transitions and the difficult path towards the restoration of constitutional order in these countries and the way forward. Other complex transitions are related to the slow implementation of peace agreements as witnessed in the case of South Sudan, CAR and Libya.

The threat of coups or attempted coups and other forms of unconstitutional changes of government is also expected to continue to loom large on the peace and security landscape of the continent. This may affect, as witnessed in 2022, countries that are in political transition induced by military

coups, and other countries facing political, socio-economic and security challenges.

Tomorrow's PSC session also comes after the conclusion of the 18th ordinary session of CISSA held between 29 January and 4 February under the theme 'Food security, conflict and peace in Africa'. Hence one aspect that CISSA will likely highlight in its briefing is the link between conflict and hunger. There has been a concerning trend witnessed in the various conflicts in the continent of the use of starvation and the destruction of agricultural products and infrastructure as a tactic of war. On the other hand, the impact of drought on food and nutrition has also been devastating. In Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, an estimated of 22 million people are now acutely food insecure because of drought.

The mismatch between humanitarian needs and assistance is expected to exacerbate the dire situation. While there is an expected reduction in humanitarian assistance in Somalia starting from the second quarter of 2023, more than eight million people across Somalia are expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse acute food insecurity outcomes between April and June 2023. This is due to the five consecutive seasons of reduced rainfall, a possible sixth season of below-average rainfall from March to June 2023, and exceptionally high food prices, further exacerbated by insecurity. Similarly, the number of people affected by hunger in West and Central Africa is projected to reach an all-time high of 48 million people (including 9 million children) in 2023.

A related challenge that will be particularly relevant for tomorrow's briefing is the interplay between climate change and insecurity. Various parts of the continent particularly the Sahel and Horn of Africa have been susceptible to climate shocks including recurrent droughts and floods. Extreme weather events operate as risk multipliers in conflict affected countries. Fierce inter-communal competition and

violence over depleting resources have led to deadly clashes. Climate change induced displacement has also created tension between host and displaced communities.

Tomorrow's session may also serve as an opportunity to follow up on the status of the requests made to the AU Commission by the PSC, including on the need to convene a meeting between the AU Commission and PSC Committee of Experts on early warning, provision of support to member states, establishment of clear communication channel with the PSC and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and elaboration of trigger mechanism.

The PSC may also reflect on how to ensure effective use of available early warning and response tools in the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (CSCPF) and its tools of the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigations Strategies (CSVMS) which are critical to enhance the early warning role of the PSC. There is also the issue of more effective use of other pillars of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) particularly the Panel of the Wise, notably for enhancing preventive diplomacy.

The expected outcome is a communique. The PSC may welcome the briefing presented by CISSA. The PSC may express concern over the deteriorating peace and security, governance and humanitarian landscape of the continent. It may underline the importance of receiving regular and institutionalized briefings on peace and security outlook to enhance its early warning capacity. The PSC may express its readiness to continue and enhance its engagement with the various bodies including the Panel of the Wise for a strengthened preventive diplomacy and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to address the structural governance challenges that continue to drive insecurity in the continent. Given the concerning trends witnessed in the continent, the PSC may underline the importance of deliberating on all countries that require PSC's

attention without facing opposition on the inclusion of any item in the agenda of the PSC. The PSC may also consider to have dedicated deliberation on how to address the issue of denialism by member states on the existence of risks and the invocation of sovereignty.