

Briefing by the ICRC on its activities and the humanitarian situation in Africa

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Tomorrow (10 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1178th session to receive annual briefing from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on its activities and the humanitarian situation in Africa.

Following opening remarks by Daniel Owassa, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Congo and PSC Chairperson for the month, Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to deliver a statement highlighting the status of cooperation between the AU and the ICRC. Patrick Youssef, Africa Regional Director for the ICRC is expected to deliver a briefing on ICRC's activities in Africa and the challenges related to humanitarian aspects of crisis and conflict situations on the continent.

Tomorrow's briefing forms part of the annual briefing of the ICRC to the PSC which has been taking place since the first such briefing at the 99th session of the PSC in November 2007. The last time the ICRC briefed the PSC was at the 1081st session of the PSC convened in May 2022. One of the key decisions adopted at the session was the request made for the AU Commission to work with relevant humanitarian partners including the ICRC, for the urgent preparation of 'a detailed

report on the data, registration and documentation of vulnerable populations in Africa'. As has been the case in such past briefings of the ICRC, tomorrow's briefing, apart from providing update on the follow up on last year's briefing, serves to provide update both on ICRC's activities and pertinent humanitarian issues of pressing concern at the time of the briefing.

There are several ongoing humanitarian crises in Africa caused by the devastating impacts of violent conflicts of various types and political instabilities taking different forms including those involving unconstitutional Changes of government in countries like the Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, among others. On the other hand, climate change, in particular floods and droughts, have adversely impacted food security and livelihoods for millions of people on the continent, for instance in Southern Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel regions of Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on the continent, exacerbating existing challenges and creating new ones.

It is against this backdrop of a complex humanitarian situation on the continent (including a recent earthquake in Morocco that affected thousands of people and devastating floods in Libya, which killed over 25,000 people) that tomorrow's session is taking place. Apart from providing data and analysis on the enormity and nature of the humanitarian crises in these various conflict and crisis settings, tomorrow's briefing is also expected to address the increasing constraint faced in humanitarian access. Similar to the worldwide trend in the rise in the number of forced displacements which registered a record 119 million people in 2022, Africa has witnessed a spike in the number of internally and externally displaced people. This trend has continued into 2023.

As a means of examining the extent of humanitarian crises in specific country/region situations, it may also interest the PSC to hear about efforts being deployed and challenges being experienced by the ICRC and other relevant humanitarian actors in some of the pressing crises at country and regional levels. One such situation which warrants PSC's increased attention is the humanitarian situation in Sudan, which is now considered to be the world's fast evolving displacement and other humanitarian crises. As emphasised in Amani Africa's [briefing](#) to the PSC's 1176th session, in less than six months, the conflict in Sudan has forcibly displaced nearly six million people, both internally and outside of the country. Some of the latest news emerging from Sudan further indicate that civilians continue to bear the brunt of much of the violence and the consequences of this war. The number of people killed as a consequence of this war has now reached over 9000, much of it a result of indiscriminate attacks and targeting of civilians. In addition to shortage of food and other basic necessities, particularly in Khartoum and east Darfur, there is also reportedly increasing incidences of looting of aid items for sale at shops, leaving the most vulnerable communities without the necessary assistance.

Another significant aspect of the war in Sudan which the PSC may wish to receive some reflections on is the attack on civilian objects which both parties to the conflict have been accused of. According to a statement made by OCHA's humanitarian coordinator on 05 October, not only are conflicting parties using civilian facilities such as schools for military purposes and exposing civilians sheltered there to the risk of being caught in the crossfire, there have also been cases of damage to pumps that supply water to camps hosting displaced people. These only form part of the larger trend of attacks against public infrastructure including hospitals, schools, water and electricity installations and places of worship, that has been ongoing since the outbreak of the conflict.

Of no less pressing concern in Sudan is the enormous impediments to humanitarian access facing both people in need of assistance and humanitarian actors. According to the UN, humanitarian actors were able to reach only 19% of the people who are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance.

Beyond the recent humanitarian crises in Sudan, the protracted humanitarian situation in the DRC also deserves attention. In the first half of 2023 alone, the surge in violence in eastern DRC has led to the displacement of nearly 1 million people, according to the displacement tracking matrix of IOM. Ituri and Kivu, two of the most affected provinces of eastern DRC are host to about 5.4 million of the total 6.1 million displaced people in the country. It is further estimated that in addition to the high displacement rate, 26 million people across the country require humanitarian assistance, majority of which are facing acute food insecurity. This grim picture is exacerbated by continuing reports of attacks against displacement camp sites, claiming the lives of hundreds of people.

The Sahel region is another one of the complex humanitarian challenges being faced in the continent. Frustrated with persistent conflicts involving terrorism, unstable political transitions and weak governance structures as well as extreme weather patterns involving frequent droughts, floods and land degradation, countries in the Sahel region are struggling to effectively address the humanitarian needs of their populations. According to the UNOCHA, out of the overall estimated population of 109 million people in the Sahel region, 34.5 percent are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Displacement rates continue to increase with instability showing no improvement in the region. As of July 2023, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region is estimated to have reached 5.9 million while the number of refugees has reached 1.5 million by August 2023. The two countries contributing most to the displacement rate are

Burkina Faso and Nigeria hosting 2.1 million and 2.2 million IDPs respectively. The humanitarian crisis in the Sahel is further compounded by recurrent outbreak of communicable diseases such as cholera, measles and meningitis.

Aside from shading some light on some of these country/region specific situations, the briefing tomorrow could also present updates on the request from the PSC to the AUC on the finalization of the AU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Statelessness in Africa. It is also expected that the briefing will give insights to the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya and give recommendations for enhanced regional cooperation and solutions which would place human rights and the dignity of migrants and refugees front and centre. The session may also reflect on the follow up on the implementation of the Post-Malabo Plan of Action 2023 – 2032. In this respect, the ICRC and PSC may explore the possibility of using the plan of action for enhanced collaboration in the mobilization of effective humanitarian action on the Continent.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. The PSC may highlight the need for further strengthening humanitarian action in the continent, especially on effective measures for early warning, conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and peacebuilding. The PSC may also urge parties to armed conflicts to respect and abide by their responsibilities under customary international humanitarian law in the conduct of their hostilities and to remove all barriers which impede access to humanitarian assistance. It may further commend the ICRC and other humanitarian actors for the efforts deployed to manage humanitarian crises in most affected parts of the continent such as Sudan, DRC, the Sahel region and others. In the light of the fact that the war in Sudan has created the world's fast evolving displacement and other humanitarian crises, the PSC may express its grave concern over the alarming scale of the

displacement and humanitarian crises in Sudan. In this respect, the PSC may call on the warring parties to immediately desist from targeting civilians and civilian infrastructures and the resort to indiscriminate attacks. To fulfil its responsibility under the principle of non-indifference and take concrete steps, the PSC may, as [proposed](#) during its 29 September session, decide to establish a taskforce dedicated to the monitoring, documenting and reporting on the humanitarian situation and protection of civilians in Sudan as critical measure for giving hearing to civilians caught up in the cross fire and discouraging the warring parties from both continuing with targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure and use of indiscriminate attacks and impeding humanitarian access. The PSC may similarly express continuing concern over the protracted humanitarian crises in Eastern DRC and the Sahel, which continue to deteriorate during the past year as a result of resurgence of violent conflicts. In regard to Eastern DRC, the PSC may, apart from calling on warring parties to respect human rights and international humanitarian law, urge that the forces deployed in Eastern DRC including those under the East African Community give particular attention to protection of civilians, including facilitation of humanitarian access.