

Briefing by the Panel of the Wise on its activities in Africa

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Tomorrow (03 March), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1142nd session, at ministerial level, to receive a briefing by the Panel of the Wise on its activities in Africa.

Following opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson for the month of March, Tanzania's minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation, Stergomena Lawrence Tax, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to deliver a statement. Domitien Ndayizeye, Chairperson of the Panel of Wise is also expected to brief the PSC.

The last time the PSC received a briefing on the activities of the Panel of the Wise was in March 2017, at its 665th session. In 2022, a session was planned to be dedicated to a briefing by the Panel of the Wise, during June, under the chairship of the Republic of Congo. However, the session was postponed, delaying the planned updates on the activities of the Panel.

It is to be recalled that at the 665th session, the PSC decided that the 'Panel of the Wise shall make quarterly briefings to the PSC, in order to enhance the conflict prevention capacity, early warning and timely decision-making processes of the Council'. Similar calls have been made by the PSC including at its 568th session, towards having more regular engagements. This is in line with the mandate of the Panel of the Wise recognized in PSC Protocol which outlines the Panel's role in

supporting the work of the PSC in conflict prevention.

Although the Panel of the Wise is expected to regularly brief and advise the PSC, the meetings have been rare particularly in the past few years and are yet to be fully institutionalised. This has affected the harmonisation and collaboration between the two organs around the role of the Panel on conflict prevention, including preventive diplomacy.

Tomorrow's session will provide an important platform to brief the PSC on a number of developments that have taken place since the last briefing session. One key development has been the appointment of new members of the fifth Panel of the Wise. The new members were appointed for a three-year term by the AU Assembly at its 35th Ordinary Session [[Assembly/AU/Dec.815\(XXXV\)](#)]. The fifth Panel includes the following eminent persons: Domitien Ndayizeye, former President of Burundi (Central Africa Region) and chair of the Panel, Amre Moussa, former Foreign Minister of Egypt and former Secretary General of the League of Arab States (Northern Africa Region), Effie Owuor (Eastern Africa Region), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (Southern Africa Region) and Babacar Kante (Western Africa Region).

Following the appointment of the members, the Panel held its inaugural meeting on 28-29 March 2022 in Addis Ababa. The meeting served, among other purposes, for the Panel to be briefed by the AU Commission on the work of its subsidiary bodies and to receive a horizon scanning briefing on issues related to peace, security and governance. The meeting was also critical to allow the Panel of the Wise to deliberate on and outline the thematic issues and country situations that need to be prioritised. Accordingly, the Panel committed to work in support of specific countries namely Sudan, South Sudan, Chad and Somalia. More particularly, on the situation in South Sudan, the Panel called for the operationalisation of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS). In this context, an

issue that may be of interest for PSC members is how these efforts by the Panel will and can contribute to the PSC's ongoing engagement in these countries and the work of the various mechanisms of the AU dealing with these country situations.

Taking into consideration various developments and the current peace and security trends, in the first year of its mandate the Panel decided to focus supporting member states holding elections, those experiencing political transitions and countries that need support around constitutionalism and promotion of consensus building, including through national dialogue, reconciliation and transitional justice issues, and climate and security. These are also areas which the PSC has deliberated on in its various sessions.

With regards to transitional justice it would be of interest for the PSC and the Panel to coordinate around further popularising the AU Transitional Justice Policy Framework adopted in February 2019. The policy framework which was developed based on the recommendation by the Panel may support its work in particular in peacebuilding, reconciliation and consensus building. Moreover, the PSC and the Panel of the Wise can reflect on ways through which the Panel can contribute to AU's role of supporting countries experiencing complex transitions. The Panel can also contribute to the implementation of PSC's previous decisions, including at its 383rd and 525th sessions, to dedicate regular sessions on national reconciliation, restoration of peace and rebuilding of cohesion in Africa.

The resurgence of military coups in multiple countries across the continent was also one of the key issues that was highlighted with grave concern in the outcome of the inaugural meeting of the fifth Panel of the Wise. The issue also took centre stage in the discussions of the inaugural joint retreat of the African Peer Review (APR) Panel of Eminent Persons and

the AU Panel of the Wise, which took place on 13 November 2022, in line with the 819th PSC session which encouraged the two organs to work in close collaboration, particularly in the area of preventive diplomacy. The 7th retreat of the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise) which was held on 20-21 October 2022 also drew attention to the growing concern of governance related peace and security challenges in its section dedicated to horizon scanning reflections. Having regard to the need for timely responding to underlying socio-economic and political grievances, governance deficits and constitutional crises that culminate in coups, the Panel of the Wise, in collaboration with the APR Panel of Eminent Persons, can play a significant role in the deployment of preventive diplomacy at the earliest warning signs of governance challenges, to avert impending military takeover of power and maintain constitutional rule in affected member states.

The briefing also comes at a high time where there is mounting political and security tension in the Great Lakes Region. The rising confrontation between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) calls for an immediate continental intervention and response in deescalating the crisis. Although regional efforts are underway, it would be critical for the Panel of the Wise, as key mandate holder in preventive diplomacy, to play its role in support of the ongoing efforts for de-escalating the tension for restoring stability in the region and to ensure that the gains made so far are not reversed.

The session also serves as an opportunity for the PSC and Panel of the Wise to reflect on how the Panel can contribute to address the existing gap between early warning and early action that hampered the effective engagement in deescalating crises before they transform into full blown armed conflicts. To address these gaps, PSC's previous decisions calling for more regular briefings from the Panel were also echoed in the

inaugural meeting of the fifth Panel. In this context, the Panel decided 'to prioritize regular horizon scanning (briefing) to the PSC to inform relevant options for response and rapid interventions in conflict situations with the aim of preventing and managing potential violent situations,' although the Panel's role is and should be on response to early warning rather than engaging in early warning.

Another issue which may be discussed in tomorrow's briefing is how to create more institutional synergy with newly formed subsidiary bodies of the Panel. In addition to PanWise and the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), a new subsidiary body has been endorsed by the AU Assembly in February 2022, the Network of African Youth on Conflict Prevention and Mediation (WiseYouth). It would be of interest for the PSC to inquire and seek clarity on the newly established WiseYouth and how it complements and coordinates with existing mechanisms including AU Youth Peace Ambassadors (AYAPs), the second cohort of which was selected in November 2021 and endorsed by the AU Assembly in February 2022 at its 35th Ordinary Session and welcomed by the PSC at its 1067th session.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a Communique. The PSC may welcome the new members of the fifth Panel of the Wise appointed by the AU Assembly at its 35th Ordinary Session. It may also welcome the establishment of WiseYouth. The PSC may take note of the outcome and priorities set during the inaugural meeting of the fifth Panel of the Wise convened from 28 to 29 March 2022. It may welcome the outcomes of the inaugural joint retreat of the Panel of the Wise and the APR Panel of Eminent Persons. Council may underline the importance of reinvigorating early warning and conflict prevention by working closely with the Panel. It may underline the importance of enhancing coordination with the Panel in supporting complex transitions, sustaining peace in fragile

contexts and ensuring early action to deescalate looming crises. To this end the PSC may reiterate its previous decision and call for the institutionalisation of conflict prevention and preventive deployment briefing by the Panel.