

Briefing on review of the structure and mandate of the RPF of UNMISS

Automatic Heading TextDate | 20 December, 2018

Today 20 December, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) will have a briefing session on the Regional Protection Force (RPF) for South Sudan. Convened on the request of Ethiopia as Chair of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the briefing is expected to provide update on the proposed review of the structure and the mandate of the (RPF). This is initiated as part of the effort to support the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 12 September 2018.

This session also builds on the 800th session of the PSC held on 10 October 2018. In the communiqué it adopted on that session, the PSC requested 'the Parties, together with IGAD and the UN, to finalise the matter relating to the deployment of the Regional Protection Force (RPF), as soon as possible, in order to ensure that the protection of civilians mandate is not compromised'.

The PSC is expected to receive the briefing from Woinshet Tadesse of Ethiopia, representing the Chairperson of IGAD. It is to be recalled that on 16 November, the IGAD Council of Ministers held an extraordinary session on South Sudan. The communiqué of that session envisaged submission of a report to 'the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) and the UN Security Council on concrete proposals to revise the mandate and structure of the RPF to allow the participation of all IGAD Member States'.

The IGAD minister's decision was a follow up to the IGAD

Assembly decision. Earlier in September, the extraordinary summit of the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government took a decision to seek from the Security Council review of the mandate of the RPF 'to allow Sudan, Uganda, Djibouti and Somalia as guarantors, to contribute forces to enhance the protection and security throughout the implementation of the R-ARCSS.' Acting on the request of the IGAD Assembly and the subsequent IGAD Ministers meeting, The IGAD Chiefs of Defence Staff/Forces established a joint technical assessment team, which visited South Sudan from 3 to 10 November to assess the security situation, with a view to reviewing the regional protection force mandate. On 22 November, the assessment team presented its report to the IGAD Chiefs of Defence Staff/Forces, who decided to formalize its recommendation to integrate forces from Djibouti, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda into the UNMISS regional protection force.

The deployment of the RPF first received the endorsement of the AU Assembly during the July 2016 summit. In its decision on South Sudan, the Assembly endorsed 'the communique of the Summit meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the IGAD-Plus, in particular with respect to the reinforcement of UNMISS as proposed by the UN Secretary-General and the call to the UN Security Council to extend the Mission of UNMISS with a revised mandate, including the deployment of a regional protection force to separate the warring parties, protect major installations and civilian population and demilitarize Juba'.

This was followed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2304, which extended the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) authorizing the expansion of the mission with deployment of a 4,000-strong RPF. The mandate of the RPF under Resolution 2304 was to 'facilitate the conditions for safe and free movement into, out of, and around Juba'; 'protect the airport to ensure the airport remains operational, and protect

key facilities in Juba;' and 'Promptly and effectively engage any actor that is credibly found to be preparing attacks, or engages in attacks, against United Nations protection of civilians sites, other United Nations premises, United Nations personnel, international and national humanitarian actors, or civilians.' Over two years since the adoption of Resolution 2304, only a total of 2,226 troops making up the RPF have thus far been deployed, according to a report of the Secretary General of the UN submitted to the UNSC early this month.

Resistance from the government of South Sudan was one of the major factors that slowed down the deployment of the RPF. At the time of the adoption of Resolution 2304 the representative of South Sudan to the UN stated the Government's rejection of the resolution. One of the major points of contention between the Government and UN was over the deployment of the RPF to protect Juba airport. At present, South Sudan's government is more receptive of the planned deployment of the troops from new contributors as part of RPF. After the visit from the Chiefs of Defense Staff/Forces of IGAD countries last month, the Minister of Cabinet Affairs informed reporters that the government has cleared the regional protection force for deployment in Juba. The meeting is also expected to reflect on the implementation of the R-ARCSS, that the South Sudanese conflict parties and other political forces signed on 12 September and since then. Of particular current importance for the session is the report on the attacks against the members of the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) by South Sudanese troops. A press release of the CTSAMVM that came out on 19 December condemned in the strongest terms what it called 'appalling attack on its Monitoring and Verification Team in the Luri Area' involving assault and illegal detention of senior ranking male and female officers by South Sudanese security forces.

It is not clear in what ways such major breach would inform

the mandate of the RPF but ensuring the protection of the CTSAMVM is key for the effective implementation of the Revitalized Agreement. The outcome of today's session of the PSC offers IGAD the foundation for requesting the consideration and adoption of the review of the mandate and composition of the RPF within the framework of UNMISS.

In terms of the review of the mandate the newly restructured RPF will be tasked with the protection of the opposition leaders once they return to the country to take part in the transitional government. It is also expected that the review of the mandate of the RPF to allow Djibouti, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda to serve as guarantors of the Revitalized Agreement to contribute forces and will enable the full deployment of the force into UNMISS.