

Briefing on the impact of COVID19 on Living Together in Peace

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Tomorrow (27 May) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold its 928th session on the impact of COVID19 on Living Together in Peace. It is envisaged to be a video teleconference session.

Held under PSC Chairperson of the month, Mafa Mosothoane Sejanamane, Ambassador of Lesotho, who will make an opening statement, the session is expected to receive updates from the Commissioner for Social Affairs, Amira El Fadil and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). Zainab Ali Kotoko the Executive Secretary of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and Solomon Ayele Dersso, Founding Director of Amani Africa, are scheduled to deliver briefings to the PSC.

The first time the PSC dedicated a session on 'Living Together in Peace' was in November 2019. At that time the format of the meeting was an open session and the PSC decided to hold annual sessions to commemorate the day. However, tomorrow's virtual meeting will be a closed briefing for PSC members.

The UNGA Resolution 72/130 adopted on 8 December 2017 designated 16 May as the 'International Day of Living Together in Peace' 'to promote peace, tolerance, inclusion, understanding and solidarity, and to express its attachment to the desire to live and act together, united in differences and diversity, in order to build a sustainable world of peace, solidarity and harmony'. The major principles and values of harmony and compassion articulated in the resolution are

particularly relevant and timely during the current fight against COVID19.

The briefing is expected to commemorate the international day amidst a global pandemic. It is thus taking place at a time that precisely requires global solidarity as well coordination and mobilization of global efforts to mitigate the spread of the pandemic. As much as the values of living together are most in demand at the moment, there are also concerning global trends of increased hostility and tension.

Tomorrow's briefing offers an opportunity to reflect on how the pandemic has impacted the global order, how multilateral institutions are adapting and the effects on peace and security in Africa. As it can be discerned from ongoing developments the values of living together and solidarity have been put under immense strain as the response to the pandemic has become highly politicized. This has further exacerbated already brewing tensions among global powers. It would be detrimental if African issues are entangled with these geostrategic big power deepening tensions.

Also, of note are the emergence of unilateralism and inward-looking approaches, that are impeding not only cooperation but also the operation of the market in medical supplies and services. A global problem most certainly requires a global solution. Moreover, for any national responses to be effective it is necessary that others are also able to muster the response necessary to ensure that no resurgence and global spread of the virus repeats itself. This means global responses should be inclusive by taking into consideration the particular needs of developing countries. This is why a greater solidarity is needed to ensure that developing countries are supported in not only fighting the health hazard but also in mitigating the socio-economic losses.

Indeed, the socio-economic fallouts from COVID19 is feared to result in more devastation than the pandemic itself. In this

context, the application of Living Together in Peace necessitates that measures are taken to prevent the wiping out of the investment put towards poverty reduction and social development. Initiatives that fall in this category include the establishment of the COVID19 response fund of the AU, the recent appeal of the UN Secretary General for a global support package of more than \$200 billion and the related joint call of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for restructuring or relieving of the debts of African countries.

At the national level it is high time to also demonstrate particular compassion and solidarity to vulnerable and marginalized groups that face high level of exposure and will be disproportionately affected by the virus and the socio-economic consequences. Among others economically disadvantaged households, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and asylum seekers require specific protection measures. There is a great risk of widening socio-economic inequalities given that the pandemic and its impact will particularly hit certain groups more than others. Thus, this requires government's efforts in bridging gaps within communities by particularly targeting the most vulnerable section of society.

Amani Africa's briefing will focus on the peace and security impact of COVID19. More particularly, it will provide an overview of the major security trends, conflict situations and the impact of the pandemic on ongoing conflict prevention and management efforts. Hence the various measures taken to contain the spread of the virus and their effects on planned elections during the year, on mediation, implementation of peace processes as well as peacekeeping operations will feature in the briefing. In line with the theme of the session 'Living Together in Peace', the briefing will highlight the need for increased global solidarity in addressing the humanitarian and socio-economic fallouts in the continent.

Resolution 72/130 highlights the need to promote the culture of peace and non-violence and underscores the importance of respect for religious and cultural diversity across the world. Multiple incidents of xenophobic attacks, discrimination and mass deportation of migrants have taken place in various parts of the world following the spread of the virus. All of these components are deterrent to effectively respond to the pandemic. As also underlined in the resolution the importance of awareness raising and education is particularly important to cultivate tolerance among communities. During this global pandemic it is critical that communication materials and messages of leaders on prevention, transmission and treatment of the virus should be strictly informed and backed by scientific findings and recommendations of health experts. This plays a key role in fighting misinformation that leads to stigma, discrimination, fear and suspicion.

In this process of awareness creation and communication, elements in the resolution related to interfaith dialogue to foster national cohesion can also be useful. In addition to the scientific community, many governments have also worked closely with religious leaders to reach out, inform and educate people on COVID19. In this regard it is extremely important for many countries and world leaders to reconcile scientific findings, religious and traditional practices. While accommodating religious and cultural diversity it is important however that strict measures are put in place against untested traditional herbal remedies that may derail control of the spread. While indigenous knowledge and practices have a great value it is also important that any form of treatment should go through a rigorous process of test and trial before being distributed.

During its 891st session the PSC underscored the importance of promoting living together in peace through regional integration and free movement of people. However, to contain the spread of the current pandemic mobility of people and

goods have been highly restricted. These limitations will most likely delay the various milestones set by the continent towards greater cooperation and integration. Nonetheless it will be important for the Council to also note that practices related to social distancing should not undermine ongoing efforts of solidarity and living together. Indeed, it is essential to physically distance while living together under the common ideals of solidarity, harmony and unity.

The global call on cessation of hostilities is another initiative that needs to be followed up. This call is particularly essential for Africa given that there is steep increase in the number of confirmed cases across the continent. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has noted a 32% increase of new cases over one week alone. As of 24 May the total confirmed cases have reached 107,412. Although currently the cases in Africa are only 2% of the global cases, however these numbers are most likely to rise and the only way the devastation that may result from the spread of the virus in conflict situations can be prevented is if a humanitarian truce is observed by conflict parties.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may primarily underline that countries cannot defeat COVID19 in isolation through unilateral measures. At the regional level the PSC could urge for more support to the AU COVID19 response fund and the work of Africa CDC and the necessity of African countries showing compassion and solidarity with the most vulnerable including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in their response to COVID19. The PSC may underscore that the fight against COVID19 should unify the world to live up to the ideals of living together in peace, harmony and tolerance and support the WHO. It may reiterate previous calls by stressing that only when all countries defeat the pandemic that the world wins the fight against COVID19. It could also welcome the call of the UN Secretary General for a global response

package of \$200 billion as a measure consistent with the values of Living Together in Peace and for avoiding the worst consequences of the socio-economic and humanitarian fallouts of the pandemic. The PSC could also emphasize the need for access to diagnostics and therapeutics and reiterate the call for access to any eventual vaccine and treatment.