

Briefing on the maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

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Tomorrow (19 December), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1128th session to receive briefing on the maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG).

The session is expected to start with opening remarks from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Victor Adekunle Adeleke, followed by a statement from AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye. The Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), Florentina Adenike Ukonga, will make presentation while the representatives of the Inter-regional Coordination Centre, Yaoundé (CRESMAO/CRESMAC); the Coordinator of the Experts for the Establishment of the Regional Maritime Task Force; as well as the representatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Indian Ocean Commission are expected to deliver statements. The representatives of United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and European Union (EU) may also deliver statements.

The issue of maritime security in the GoG has been gaining attention both at the PSC and UN Security Council in recent years as piracy and armed robbery at sea continues to persist. This hugely affects the shipping industry and the economy of the coastal states of the region and beyond. The financial loss occasioned by these acts is estimated to be over US\$1.9

billion every year. It is the second time that PSC is dedicating a session on maritime security in the GoG in less than six months. The last dedicated session was at its [1090th](#) meeting on 28 June this year under the chairship of Congo. Before that PSC also considered maritime security in the region at its [1012th](#) session in July 2021 during the chairship of Nigeria, also highlighting the political weight that countries of the GoG attach to the issue. On the side of UN Security Council, it is to be recalled that UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on maritime security in the GoG ([S/RES/2634\(2022\)](#)) on 31 May this year, which was co-sponsored by Ghana and Norway. Most recently, on 22 November, the Security Council also held a briefing on piracy in the GoG and received the Secretary General's report on the 'situation of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea and its underlying causes'.

In its last dedicated session on maritime security in the GoG, PSC expressed its 'deep concern' over the threat of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region and called upon the AU Commission, among others, to undertake assessment of the implementation of all instruments and frameworks on maritime security with the view to addressing the gaps and propose strategies to enhance their implementation. It further directed the Commission to set up 'a body of experts or a Task Force' to provide technical expertise to Member States and other stakeholders on maritime security in the continent. PSC's 1012th session further envisioned a naval capacity within the African Standby Force (ASF) framework to address maritime security threats in the continent. Tomorrow's session therefore affords PSC the opportunity to follow-up the implementation of its previous decisions, as well as receive updates on the state of maritime security in the GoG and inform next steps.

Despite the persistence of the problem, the GoG has witnessed

a downward trend of piracy and armed robbery at sea. According to the recent UN Secretary-General Report (S/2022/818) submitted to the Security Council, maritime crime including piracy and armed robbery at sea dropped from 123 in 2020 to 45 in 2021, and this trend has continued in 2022 as well. The decline in number of incidents is attributed to increased naval patrols by Nigeria, the impact of piracy convictions in Nigeria and Togo, improved cooperation among countries of the region, and deployment of non-GoG navies, among other factors. Despite this encouraging development, not only the security threat persisted but also new worrying trends are also emerging. In that regard, Secretary-General's Report notes 'a noticeable shift' in the geographical location of piracy incidents from ECOWAS to ECCAS regional waters, further highlighting the need to enhance cooperation and coordination between the regional mechanisms in tackling the threat.

GoG countries have launched various initiatives including efforts to put the necessary legal and institutional frameworks in place as part of the efforts to address piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region. One of such notable initiatives at the national level is Nigeria's US\$ 195 million worth 'Deep Blue Project' to counter piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region. The country also passed an anti-piracy bill, the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act, in 2019. In 2021, two convictions for piracy were secured in Nigeria and Togo for the first time in the West Africa region. It is worth noting that only five countries (Cabo Verde, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo) have passed bills that criminalize piracy.

At the regional level, the Yaoundé maritime security architecture, which culminated from the signing of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in June 2013 by 25 West and Central African Countries, remain at the heart of the regional strategy for maritime security. The architecture envisages the establishment of regional centres for information sharing and

coordination including the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé (Cameroon), the Regional Centre for Maritime Security of West Africa (CRESMAO) in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security of Central Africa (CRESMAC) in Pointe-Noire (Congo). Five Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres are also set-up to monitor maritime activities and share actionable maritime security-related information at the inter-zonal level. Currently, there are efforts to establish a Regional Maritime Task Force for the GoG in line with PSC communique adopted at its 1012th session. To that end, the Chiefs of the Naval Staff who met in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, in May 2022, agreed to set-up a technical expert committee to expedite the creation of the regional maritime task force, which will contribute to the better maritime security of the region. International partners have also stepped-up partnership support to the ongoing regional efforts including through Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and its Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE), the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, and the European Union Coordinated Maritime Presences in the Gulf of Guinea.

Despite progress achieved in terms of operationalizing the Yaoundé architecture over the years, lack of predictable and sustainable funding, limited capacity, and lack of clarity over division of labour among the different structures remain critical challenges for its full operationalization.

The African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter) adopted in 2016, the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) adopted in 2014, and the revised African Maritime Transport Charter adopted in 2010 are among the relevant instruments to maritime security at the continental level. It is worth recalling that PSC, at its 1090th session in June, requested the AU Commission to review the implementation of all the existing instruments and frameworks on maritime security with the view to enhancing

their implementation. Members of the PSC may wish to hear from the Commission if there is any progress in the review process.

Another issue likely to be emphasized in tomorrow's session is the imperative of adopting comprehensive strategy against maritime insecurity in the region. The ongoing security responses are indeed necessary but not sufficient to meaningfully address the threat of piracy and armed robbery nor to sustain the recent gains. The phenomenon of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region is attributed to multiple factors including bad governance, high poverty and unemployment, weak natural resources governance, environmental degradation, illegal and unregulated fishing, and inadequate access to public services. Any strategy- whether at national, regional, or continental level- therefore need to fully recognize the underlying socio-economic, political governance and environmental challenges that underpin the menaces in the maritime domain.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. The PSC is expected to express serious concern over the persistence of the threat of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the GoG as well as the economic cost to the countries of the region. While PSC may welcome the recent declines in the instances of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region, it may also express concern over the emerging shift in the geographical location of piracy incidents from ECOWAS to ECCAS regional waters, and in that regard, it may call upon Member States in the region, ECOWAS, ECCAS, and the GGC to enhance cooperation and coordination in the fight against maritime crimes in the GoG. PSC may emphasize the importance of international support to the region, but it is also expected to underscore the primary responsibility of the countries of the region for combating piracy and armed robbery at sea. In that regard, PSC may commend Member States of the region for the political will as reflected in the positive steps taken to operationalize the Yaoundé architecture and strengthen

enforcement mechanisms, but it may further emphasize the need to address the remaining challenges for the full operationalization of the architecture. PSC is also expected to welcome the creation of the technical expert committee for the establishment of the Regional Maritime Task Force for the GoG and may call upon Member States and partners to support their effort for the realization of the task force. PSC may urge Member States of the region to put in place the necessary legal framework for the criminalization and prosecution of perpetrators under their domestic laws. In that regard, PSC may commend Nigeria and Togo for the first-ever conviction of piracy under their anti-piracy laws. In light of the multidimensional nature of the threat of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region, PSC may also underline the imperative of adopting a comprehensive strategy that addresses the underlying causes of the threat.