

Briefing on the Situation in Mali

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Tomorrow (02 September), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to convene its 1027th session to receive updates on the situation in Mali and consider the report of PSC's evaluation mission to Mali which was undertaken from 14 to 17 July, in line with Council's decision under Paragraph 11 of its 1001st Communiqué.

The session is expected to have an open and closed segment. During the open segment, the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Chad to the AU, Mahamat Ali Hassan, will be delivering opening remarks to be followed by a statement from the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission (SRCC) for Mali and Head of the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) is also expected to make a presentation during the open segment of the session, which is to be followed by statements from the Representative of Republic of Ghana, Chair of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the Representative of the European Union (EU) Delegation to the AU. At the closed segment of the session, Victor Adeleke, Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the AU will present the evaluation report to Council members, as the PSC Chairperson during the month of July, when the evaluation mission to Mali was conducted.

Tomorrow's session is expected to deliberate on the findings of PSC's evaluation mission report which may capture some of the key developments that have been unfolding in the country's

socio-political, security, economic and human rights and humanitarian situation since Council's last deliberation at its 1001st session, which saw the country suspended from all AU activities following the coup of 24 May 2021. While ECOWAS's suspension clearly defines a timeline (until after the February 2022 elections and the formation of a democratically elected government), the PSC has set some preconditions that need to be met before it can lift its suspension.

One of Council's demands stressed at its previous session was the immediate appointment of a civilian Prime Minister to lead the conclusion of the 18 months transition period. The appointment of Choguel Kokala Maiga, chairman of the strategic committee of the June 5 Movement, Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) has hence been a welcome step in the right direction. The release of the former interim President and Prime Minister of the transitional government who were kept under house arrest following their ouster also meets another one of Council's demands. The pledge made by the current authorities to forge ahead with the elections planned for February 2022 and to remain committed to the full implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali are also expected to receive the attention of the PSC. There has been no indication the Council's call to refrain from taking part as candidates for the upcoming presidential election will be heeded.

Another development that would be of interest to PSC members during tomorrow's session is the adoption of the Government Action Plan 2021-2022 (PAG). As highlighted in PSC's evaluation mission report, the PAG is based on four main pillars which are: strengthening national security; ensuring political and institutional reforms; organisation of general elections and promotion of good governance and the adoption of a social stability pact. While the adoption of this key document is encouraging on its own and demonstrates the

commitment of the new transitional authorities to conduct the elections, there is still no concrete agreement on an independent election management body which may result in delaying the planned elections.

The issues contained in the Communiqué summarising the outcomes of the visit by ECOWAS mediator for Mali, Goodluck Johnathan, conducted from 9 to 12 May, would also be of interest to PSC members. In this respect, the areas of progress noted in the communiqué include: the initiation of judicial processes relating to those arrested over alleged attempts of destabilising the country and their eventual acquittal; the gradual return of State authority to parts of the country where terrorist groups are active; and the disarmament (albeit slow) and conversion of some armed self-defence groups. On the other hand, lack of consensus on the choice of the election management bodies; lack of inclusivity and clarity in the conduct of the transition and lack of progress with respect to human rights and rule of law were the major concerns underscored. PSC's evaluation mission has also highlighted similar concerns, particularly with regards to the implementation of major reforms which are lagging and yet to commence despite the approaching deadline of the transition period. One major example highlighted in this regard is the pending measures towards updating the electoral and referendum timetable of 31 October 2021.

With respect to the security situation, there is reasonable fear that the recurrence of coups in the country could embolden insurgent groups by demonstrating weakness in the State's cohesion and its security apparatus. The jihadist attack which took place in June 2021 claiming the lives of 160 people and another one staged in August which killed 17 Malian soldiers and was claimed by the al-Qaeda-affiliated 'Support Group for Islam and Muslims' are illustrative of such tendency of such groups. Given Mali's strategic importance in the fight against terrorism in the overall Sahel region, the uncertainty

resulting from the country's political instability also puts at risk the regional response to terrorism and violent extremism and could further destabilise the wider Sahel region. Moreover, despite gains made in disarmament of some armed self-defence groups, the country's security situation still continues to be marked by the presence of non-State armed groups along its border areas. Inter-communal violence and attacks on national and international militaries and humanitarian actors as well as kidnapping, looting and killings of villagers also continue to characterise the security landscape in Mali. Added to these circumstances are gaps that may result from France's decision to scale down its military presence and the announcement by Chad of its decision to withdraw half of its troops from the G5-Sahel Joint Force deployed in the three-border region along central Mali. The area which is known to be hit hardest by terrorists could hence experience further deterioration due to the reduction in troops. There is a possibility for filling in these gaps through the deployment by the AU of 3000 troops to the Sahel region in line with Assembly/AU/Dec.792(XXXIII), although progress to achieve this remains limited. Another option that could be considered is the deployment of the Battalions of Reconstituted Armed Forces (BATFAR). Although the redeployment of reconstituted Malian armed and security forces is envisaged in the Algiers Accord, the operationalisation of the process remains incomplete and slow.

Mali's humanitarian situation also continues to deteriorate. As UN reports demonstrate, the country's already fragile and complex humanitarian context has worsened as a result of the political volatility from the recent coup. An increase in attacks against civilians, particularly in the central and northern regions of the country, has led to unprecedented increase in displacement rates. As of the end of May 2021, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country has reached 372,266, out of which, 63% are children. In addition to the increase in displacement rates, various

human rights violations have also been recorded including attacks against civilians by security forces, gender-based violence and recruitment of children by armed groups. Added to these, the socio-economic situation in the country is also suffering due the negative impact of the recent coup on Mali's international relations and the level of insecurity and instability.

The outcome of tomorrow's session is expected to be a Communiqué. Council may reflect, based on the report of its evaluation mission, on the status of implementation of the conditions it laid down at its 1001st session and highlight the areas where the AU could extend support to Mali's transition. It may commend the current Malian authorities for taking some encouraging steps to maintain the gains achieved in the country's political transition and urge them to ensure that the planned elections will be conducted at the end of the transition period, without any delays and preconditions. Council may also once again urge Mali's transitional authorities to refrain from taking part in the upcoming elections and to work towards ensuring non-interference of the military in political issues. Welcoming the adoption of the PAG 2021-2022, Council may also call on the transitional government to publish a feasible timeline for the actualisation of key activities outlined therein. It may encourage Malian parties to work towards finalising the major outstanding reforms that need to be completed before the end of the transitional period including most particularly reaching consensus on the electoral management body, and welcome the planned visit of ECOWAS mediator on 05-07 September 2021 to engage Malian actors. The PSC may urge all actors in Mali to observe respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and request the AU Commission, working with ECOWAS, to support Mali in implementing a robust framework for compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law. Having regard to the humanitarian needs and security threats in the country and the wider region, Council

may also appeal to the international community to strengthen its assistance.