

Briefing on the situation in South Sudan

Automatic Heading TextDate | 11 June, 2019

Tomorrow (11 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will receive a briefing on the situation in South Sudan. The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Chergui

is expected to brief the PSC. Ethiopia as the chair of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is expected to make a statement. South Africa as an A3 and chair of the AU High-Level Ad Hoc Committee of five countries from the five regions of the AU (C5) on South Sudan may also deliver a statement.

The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (RARCSS) on 12 September 2018 has resulted in the reduction of political violence. However, ethnic and inter-communal violence, as well as clashes between government and opposition armed groups continue to be prevalent particularly in the Greater Upper Nile and the Greater Equatoria regions.

Since the last PSC field mission to South Sudan in March 2019 which aimed at following up on the implementation status of the R-ARCSS major developments have taken place in the country as well as in the region. This PSC session is taking place at a time where key political developments in the region are evolving and taking shape.

The R-ARCSS stipulated that 12 May marks the end of the eight-month pre-transitional period and the start of the thirty six-month transitional period, with elections to be held 60 days before the end of the transitional period. In April, opposition leader Riek Machar, who is yet to return

to Juba from Sudan, called for this deadline to be extended, due to the pending key tasks and unmet political and security benchmarks of the pre-transition period set out in the R-ARCSS.

The IGAD Council of Ministers at its 67th Extra-Ordinary Session on 7 May 2019 in Juba, South Sudan, under the chairmanship of Ethiopia endorsed the extension of request and called for 'all steps necessary be taken to expedite the implementation of the pending tasks, within this extended non-renewable timeline'. During the ministerial meeting the interim Chairperson of Revitalized Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC) stated that assessment report on the status of the implementation of the Pre-Transitional tasks has identified that 'out of 59 key tasks, only 27 had been completed, 17 were still on going while 15 are pending'.

The critical tasks including cantonment, training, unification and deployment of forces, the reconstitution of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission, as well as determination of the number and boundaries of States and the restructuring and composition of the Council of States are still pending according to the R-JMEC report. A joint UN, AU and IGAD mission led by UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the AUC, Smail Chergui, and IGAD Special Envoy to South Sudan, Ismail Wais, visited Juba, from 10 to 12 May. The aim of the visit was to provide support to the peace process in South Sudan, complementing the 3 May 2019 agreement facilitated by IGAD that extended the pretransitional period by six months. The delegation strongly urged that the extension has to be the last one.

The most crucial issue for the success of the newly extended pre-transitional period is the implementation of the security arrangements. One challenge is the lack of funding for the implementation of the security benchmarks of the pre-transitional period. Without funding and in the absence of the

implementation of the security arrangements, there is risk of the additional six-month pre-transitional period coming and going without the formation of the transitional national unity government. This is one of the issues that South Africa as Chair of the C5 is expected to highlight. There are already signs that implementation of the RARCSS will continue to face major challenges. Despite the six-month extension until November 2019, President Salva Kiir has stated that the formation of a unity government should be postponed by at least a year. This suggestion was made following government's claim of its inability to disarm, house, train and integrate the country's various forces since the deal has been signed.

More particularly the upcoming rainy season was seen as a critical factor that will inhibit the completion of integration within six months. Parallel to this political process the UN Security Council has decided to renew until 31 May 2020 the arms embargo it imposed on South Sudan the previous year, as well as the sanctions imposed in 2015 on those spoiling the peace process. The resolution passed with 10 votes in favour and 5 abstentions including by the A3 block namely Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa. The A3 group collectively argued that sanctions will not be useful for the on-going IGAD and AU led political process and further urged for a more supportive and encouraging approach towards the progress made in the country. The penholder of the resolution, the US, although discontented by the A3 position, expressed readiness to consider adjustments depending on the progress made towards peace in South Sudan. In June, the UNSC is planned to receive a briefing and deliberate on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on South Sudan.

The last briefing that the PSC received on South Sudan was in January by the C5. The C5 has signed the RARCSS as guarantor, which helped its integration in the peace process. C5 is expected to contribute to providing guidance in carrying out their role as guarantors of the RARCSS, including in the

mobilization and provision of support for the implementation of the pre-transitional benchmarks, particularly those relating to the security sector. The steps that the C5 are taking and the plan of the C5 in this respect are issues expected to receive attention in South Africa's intervention and the deliberations by PSC members. The role of C5 is expected to further increase at this particular moment in supporting IGAD's political effort given the leadership gap that may be created due to the absence of one of the key R-ARCSS guarantors, Sudan, both on account of the internal crisis facing Sudan and its suspension from the AU following the 3 June deadly attacks against protestors and civilians by the Transitional Military Council. The embroilment of Sudan in major political crisis is also feared to affect the South Sudan peace process in other ways given Sudan's role in the past as a place from which the SPLM-IO and its leader Riek Machar seek support. In this context, another issue of interest for the PSC is the need for enhanced coordination and synergy between the C5, R-JMEC and IGAD. The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may underline the need to prevent any further delay of the implementation of the R-ARCSS and to avoid the extension of the pre-transitional period. It may reiterate the recommendations made by R-JMEC and call on the reconstitution of the DDR Commission, for the Transitional Government of National Unity to disburse the funds pledged to the National Pre-Transitional Committee and the Independent Boundaries Commission to expedite its work and submit its report immediately. It may further call on AU member states and partners to support addressing the financial constraints and provide technical assistance in the various security mechanisms.