

Briefing on the Situation in South Sudan

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Tomorrow (27 January) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to meet to consider the situation in South Sudan. The Director of the Department of Peace and Security, Admore Kambudzi, is expected to brief the Council. Sudan, current Chairperson of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the UN are expected to deliver statements.

At its meeting on Monday, the PSC is expected to assess the progress made over the past two months and may express concern over delays in the resolution of the outstanding issues in relation to the pre transitional tasks.

The last time the AUPSC met to discuss South Sudan was in November after the expiry of the extended pretransitional period and the agreement reached by the parties to extend it for an additional period of 100 days following the Entebbe Summit convened by the guarantors. The PSC welcomed the extension to help address pending issues relating to security arrangements and number of states and internal boundaries of South Sudan, which are critical to the full implementation of the Revitalized Agreement. In this regard, it underscored the need for the parties to agree on a systematic approach for addressing outstanding matters, with a view to effectively and efficiently utilizing the 100 days to complete the remaining crucial tasks. It also requested the Chairperson of the Commission to brief the PSC on a monthly basis on the situation in South Sudan until the end of the 100 days extension of the pre-transitional period. It is in this context that the meeting on Monday will take place and it will afford the PSC the opportunity to assess progress with barely

30 days left before the expiry of the 100 days extension.

The half-way mark of the 100 days extension has already passed and not much progress seems to have been made in resolving the outstanding issues. The provision of food and supplies to the cantonment sites was an issue. How much progress has been made in terms of the screening, selection and training of the necessary unified forces will be critical in putting in place the security arrangements as provided for in the revitalized peace agreement. The government has released part of the funds, albeit late, to the tune of 40 million USD to help implementation.

However, ensuring accountability and transparency in the allocation and use of the funds remains a matter of concern.

The last two months have witnessed series of meetings by the principal signatories with a view to addressing the outstanding issues on the security arrangements and the number and boundaries of States. Riek Machar has been travelling to Juba to meet with President Salva Kiir and iron out differences on the pending tasks. The last IGAD Summit held in Addis Ababa last November was concluded without deciding on the status of Riek Machar.

It is to be recalled that the 67th extraordinary session of the IGAD Council of Ministers had recommended to the Summit to lift any restrictions on Riek Machar.

Even though the Summit has not yet done so, Dr. Machar has been travelling in the region without difficulty and the latest meeting between him and President Kiir took place in Juba in January. No breakthrough has yet been achieved and the discussions will have to continue to find a way forward.

South Africa's Deputy President David Mabuza in his capacity as South Africa's Special Envoy to South Sudan is reported to have proposed an arbitration to address the question on the number and boundaries of states. While the government has

accepted the proposal, SPLM-IO indicated that the process has to be completed before the formation of the unity government. Angelina Teny, spouse of Dr. Riek Machar and Head of SPLMIO's Committee for Defense is reported to have said that 'the unity government cannot be formed before the pending tasks are finalized within the extended deadline'.

The parties have failed twice to form a revitalized unity government and time is fast running out for them. The remaining few days are going to be very critical for the parties to iron out their differences and pave the way for the formation of an inclusive transitional government.

Unless the parties demonstrate the necessary political will to do so, the possibility of the 100 days extension expiring without any meaningful progress cannot be ruled out. It is this likelihood that is creating growing frustration and fear in the region and beyond. The United State is pushing for stronger sanctions if the parties fail to form an inclusive transitional government before the expiry of the 100 days period. It has already taken unilateral sanction against Vice President Taban Deng, among others, for his alleged role in undermining the peace process. At its last meeting, the PSC had also urged the international partners to consider punitive measures, including targeted sanctions, to be imposed against those who continue to undermine the peace process in South Sudan.

This said, so far, the ceasefire is holding, and it was reinforced recently by the signing of a peace declaration in Rome between the government of South Sudan, the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA) under the facilitation of the Community of Sant'Egidio. Through the Declaration, the signatories recommitted themselves to adhere to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement of December 2017 and avoid any further confrontation across the country to create conducive environment for dialogue to resolve the conflict. That SSOMA, which is a coalition of holdout opposition groups including

the National Salvation Front (NAS) led by General Crillo, committed themselves to the cessation of hostilities is encouraging. The government and the holdout opposition groups are expected to meet again in Rome to discuss about the monitoring mechanism of the cessation of hostilities. The Community of Sant'Egidio is also trying to initiate direct talks between the government and these non-signatory parties of the revitalized agreement. Efforts exerted to bring these parties on board have so far failed to bring the desired result.

If the outstanding issues including the number and boundaries of states are not consensually resolved before the end of the additional 100-day time period, it remains unclear how the unity government will be formed and whether it will have the support of the SPLM-IO. Under these conditions it is uncertain that the cessation of hostilities will continue to hold.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. The PSC may welcome the series of meetings between President Salva Kiir and SPLM-IO leader Riek Machar and urge them to demonstrate the necessary political will to resolve their differences on outstanding issues in the remaining few days before the expiry of the 100-day time period and agree to form an all-inclusive transitional government. The PSC may express appreciation to the Deputy President of South Africa and other members of the Committee of Five in their efforts in trying to find a compromise solution to the issue of the number and boundaries of states. The PSC may further welcome the release of funds by the government for implementation of the pre-transitional tasks and underscore the need to release the remaining amount to help expedite implementation in the remaining days of the pre transition period and ensure the necessary transparency and accountability. The PSC may welcome the signing of the peace declaration in Rome. The PSC is expected to visit Juba before the expiry of the 100 days extension.