

Briefing on the situation in Sudan

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Tomorrow (27 May), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1156th session at the level of Heads of State and Government to consider the situation in Sudan.

Uganda's President and chairperson of the PSC for the month of May, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, will preside over the session. President of the Union of the Comoros and Chairperson of the AU, Azali Assoumani, is expected to make remarks while the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, will brief the PSC. Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Workneh Gebeyehu; Executive Secretary of the League of Arab States, Ahmen Aboul Gheit; Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), António Guterres; as well as the representative of Egypt are also expected to deliver statements.

The PSC is convening on Sudan for the second time in less than two weeks, constituting the third session of the PSC since the outbreak of the conflict on 15 April 2023. The last time the PSC met on Sudan was on 16 May, at its 1154th session, with a [press statement](#) released as the product of the session. In the press statement, the PSC, apart from condemning the ongoing fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), warned that 'all perpetrators of criminal actions will be held accountable.' This warning came against the backdrop of the widespread looting and destruction of civilian infrastructure, as well as diplomatic missions in violation of international law.

As the fighting continued, new dynamics are emerging in the

conflict while exacerbating the existing ones. On 22 May, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sudan and Head of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), Volker Perthes, in his briefing to the UN Security Council, raised alarm over the 'growing ethnicization' of the ongoing fighting and its risk of 'engulfing the country in a prolonged conflict, with implication for the region.' This was particularly manifested in West Darfur's El Geneina where the fighting between SAF and RSF morphed into ethnic violence on 24 April while ethnic mobilization is simmering in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile region.

As the belligerents opted for urban warfare with sheer disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights, the humanitarian consequence of the conflict in Sudan has become devastating. Sources indicate that more than 850 civilians have been killed and over 5,000 injured since the fighting began. The number of displaced people due to the conflict has now topped the 1 million mark, fleeing to safer locations inside and outside the country. Despite the pressing need for humanitarian aid, the [revised](#) Humanitarian Response Plan launched by OCHA was able to secure 12.4% of the required \$2.6 billion funds to reach 18 million people in need.

Looting has become rampant in Khartoum and elsewhere and key civilian infrastructures have been targeted, severely restricting the accessibility of essential goods and services to those who are caught in the crossfire. During the 22 May briefing to the UN Security Council, SRSF Perthes highlighted the collapse of the health sector with more than two-thirds of hospitals being closed. International organizations such as the UN, humanitarian actors and diplomatic missions are not spared from the attacks and the widespread looting.

As documented by [Amani Africa](#), ten declarations for ceasefire have been announced with many of which represent the parties' expression of readiness to observe the declared ceasefire.

However, almost all of the ceasefires did not hold. The latest of these is the Short-Term Ceasefire and Humanitarian Arrangements signed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 20 May. Envisaged to become effective on 22 May, this latest ceasefire seeks to facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance and the restoration of essential services. Unlike the previous ones, the ceasefire agreement is the first with a monitoring mechanism comprising the representatives of Saudi Arabia and the US, albeit it lacks effectiveness in the absence of presence on the ground or the involvement of Sudanese on the ground. It is hoped to provide a brief respite for the civilians from the enormous suffering, but the fighting has not meaningfully stopped as in the previous ceasefires.

Tomorrow's session will present PSC members with the opportunity to take stock of the ongoing diplomatic efforts and discuss the next steps to end the conflict. Given that the session is convened at the highest (summit) level, the PSC is expected to take strategic decisions based on the De-Escalation Plan, which is expected to guide tomorrow's discussion on Sudan. It is to be recalled that the 20 April Ministerial Special Session on Sudan requested the development of an urgent plan for de-escalation. In his briefing to the UN Security Council on 22 May, Bankole outlined the six pillars of the Plan that need to be addressed for a sustainable resolution of the conflict in Sudan. These pillars are:

1. Co-ordinated international action to avoid a proliferation and duplication of mediation initiatives;
2. Immediate, comprehensive and unconditional ceasefire;
3. Urgent humanitarian action to relieve the suffering of the Sudanese people;
4. Protection of civilians, state infrastructure and ensuring accountability;
5. Firm support to neighboring countries of the region impacted by the crisis; and

6. Resumption of inclusive and fully representative political process towards a democratic, civilian-led government.

Indeed, one of the concerns emerging out of the ongoing diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict is the proliferation of actors and mediation initiatives. Despite that the key actors who participated during the 20 Ministerial Special Session agreed to 'coordinate, collaborate, and harmonize their respective initiatives to resolve the conflict', the initiatives are not only uncoordinated but also at times competing.

The 16 April emergency session of the PSC as well as the Ministerial Special Session envisaged the Chairperson of the AU Commission to take the leadership in coordinating international responses to the crisis within the framework of the Trilateral Mechanism (AU-IGAD-UN). On the other hand, IGAD's 16 April extraordinary summit formed a high-level delegation led by South Sudan's President Salva Kiir Mayardit. The 7 May emergency ministerial level meeting of the League of Arab States (LAS) established a contact group on Sudan composed of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the LAS Secretary-General to find a peaceful settlement for the conflict. It was in addition to these diplomatic initiatives that Saudi Arabia and the US created a separate mediation track that culminated in the signing of two important agreements: the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan and the 20 May Short-Term Ceasefire and Humanitarian Arrangements.

Regional actors such as the AU and IGAD may appreciate the outcomes of the Jeddah mediation process, but are likely to remain unhappy with a process that has sidelined them. The need for the involvement of regional actors has been a major issue emphasized by the different speakers during the 22 May UN Security Council briefing. For instance, IGAD's Executive Secretary stressed the importance of involving Sudan's

neighbors, while the African Members in the UN Security Council (A3) reaffirmed 'the central role of the AU, IGAD and the Trilateral Mechanism in stabilizing Sudan'.

The other key concern is that ongoing diplomatic efforts have failed to include one of the key stakeholders in Sudan's peace process – the civilians. This is a major omission considering that civilian actors in their various formations continue to play, as they did during and since the 2019 Sudan revolution, a vital role towards the achievement of democratic transition. Since the outbreak of the war, civilians continue to display their organizational ingenuity in identifying safe corridors for civilians to escape the sights of fighting to safer areas, in organizing humanitarian help of various kinds including medical assistance in their neighborhoods and in signing local peace agreements. In light of the nature of the conflict, it is a missed opportunity that international diplomatic efforts are not leveraging these various local initiatives for enhancing the space for civilian protection, ceasefire monitoring, local level peace building and humanitarian protection. Tomorrow's session is an opportunity for the PSC to call on the representation of civilians in all diplomatic efforts.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. It is expected that the PSC will endorse the De-escalation Plan developed by the AU Commission pursuant to the 20 April Ministerial Special Session. PSC may welcome the signing of a Seven-day Agreement on a Short-Term Ceasefire and Humanitarian Arrangements in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 20 May, while expressing its deep concern over the reported violations of the Agreement by both sides. It may remind the parties of their obligations under international law and urge them to fully uphold their commitments under the Agreement. As the duration of the ceasefire agreement expires early next week, the PSC may urge the parties to extend the agreement for additional periods so that it paves the way for talks towards

a more comprehensive ceasefire agreement. The PSC may commend various civilian actors in Sudan for their efforts in lessening the impact of the war on civilians through local humanitarian action, peace agreements and identification of safe corridors. It may emphasize the need for international diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to leverage and support these local civilian initiatives and ensure that civilians are represented in negotiations. Against the widespread looting and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights by the parties, the PSC may call for the documentation and reporting of the various acts of violations as the key measure for ensuring the protection of civilians. While noting Saudi Arabia/US facilitated talks in Jeddah, the PSC may stress not only the imperative of a coordinated and consolidated diplomatic effort to resolve the conflict but also the centrality of the region (AU, IGAD, the Trilateral Mechanism, and the neighboring countries) in this process. In this respect, the PSC may call for the establishment of **an international contact group on Sudan** co-chaired by the AU and the UN and represented by all regional and international actors including the sponsors of the recent ceasefire.