

Briefing on the Situation in Sudan

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Tomorrow (April 18), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1209th session on the situation in Sudan.

The session will commence with an opening statement by Jainaba Jange, Permanent Representative of the Republic of The Gambia to the AU and stand-in Chairperson of the PSC for the month. This is followed by introductory remarks from Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). It is envisaged that Mohammed Ibn Chambas, AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns and Chair of the AU High Level Panel on Sudan will deliver the briefing. Additionally, representatives of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Ramtane Lamamra, Personal Envoy of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General for Sudan are also expected to make statements.

Indicating lack of sustained engagement on the part of the PSC, the last substantive PSC convening was in November 2023 during which the PSC decided on the establishment of an ad hoc High-Level Panel on Sudan, after months of calls for such a standing mechanism dedicated to the Sudan file on a fulltime basis. In line with the Communique of the 1185th meeting of the PSC, the AU Commission Chairperson finally acted on the PSC decision with the [appointment](#) of the High-Level Panel comprising of Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, chair of the Panel and Dr Specioza Wandira-Kazibwe, Former Vice President of the Republic of Uganda and Ambassador Fransisco Madeira, Former Special Representative of the Chairperson to Somalia and Head of AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

It is anticipated that tomorrow's session will focus on three major issues. The first one concerns the current state of the conflict situation in Sudan. The second area relates to the current state of the various initiatives for the resolution of the conflict. This would cover activities undertaken by the AU Ad Hoc Panel. Considering the grave humanitarian situation that the war has induced, the third area that warrants PSC's attention in tomorrow's meeting would be the dire humanitarian situation in Sudan and ways to mitigate this crisis including the role that the AU brings to bear in this respect.

A year into the outbreak of the war, there is no indication of any slowing down of the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Between 26 October and 4 November 2023, RSF and its allied forces gained ground, claiming to seize control of South Darfur capital Nyala (the second largest city), Central Darfur capital Zalingei, and El Geneina of West Darfur. During the last quarter of the year, the war expanded beyond Khartoum, Darfur and South Kordofan as RSF marched on Wad Medani, Gezira state, launched new offensive on South Kordofan and initiated fighting in Gedaref and the White Nile regions.

Highlighting that the two sides are locked down in a battle for dominance and to resolve their contest through fighting, as RSF's campaign expands its territorial reach, particularly into Eastern Sudan lost momentum, the SAF has since January been on a counteroffensive in an attempt to regain lost territories in Omdurman and Gezira. Relying significantly on its airpower bolstered by combat drones, reportedly supplied by Iran, the SAF's counter-offensive delivered some success as it recaptured territories in Omdurman.

Indications of further worsening of the security situation, with risks of more actors joining the fighting, are also notable. In Darfur, the situation is getting worse as non-Arab armed groups aligned with SAF are facing off against the RSF for dangerous fighting, involving acts of mass atrocities by

the RSF. There is also the mobilization of militias on the side of SAF in eastern Sudan and River Nile, Northern and Kassala states.

The AU High-Level Panel on Sudan [commenced](#) its work two weeks after the appointment. Since their appointment, the members of the Panel have engaged with other mechanisms on Sudan such as the [Expanded Mechanism](#) on the sideline of the AU Summit in February 2024 as well as the regional bloc IGAD, where the Panel reiterated its plan to push forth the implementation of the AU [Roadmap](#) for the Resolution of the conflict in Sudan and its commitment to an inclusive process that will engage all Sudanese stakeholders as well as partners.

What makes the war in Sudan destructive is not merely the fact that the two warring parties are determined to achieve their objectives through military means, with each believing that it can win the war. The actions of both the RSF and the SAF in conducting hostilities show a complete lack of regard for the rules of war, albeit to various degrees. Apart from the destruction, death, mayhem and displacement caused by the indiscriminate use of force, civilians have become a battle ground as they become direct targets of mass atrocities, rape and other forms of sexual violence particularly in RSF-held areas. Both parties to the conflict are also engaged in impeding humanitarian access.

After a year of a brutal war fought without any regard for the rules of war, Sudan is in the process of collapsing. As the UN Secretary-General [warned](#) in a briefing to the UNSC last month, this 'could ignite regional instability of dramatic proportions, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea.'

In light of these dire security conditions, the issue of how to secure some kind of a halt to hostilities is a major pressing issue that deserves particular attention in tomorrow's session. One option for the PSC is to try and

contribute to securing the kind of internationally supported and protected humanitarian ceasefire agreement that established the ground for further peace efforts in Darfur in the early 2000s. **The other option available is for the PSC to call on the UNSC to adopt a decision on the establishment of internationally protected humanitarian corridors for facilitating access to civilians.** Short of these, the PSC can also take an initiative on its own focusing on the facilitation of humanitarian access by establishing a mechanism dedicated to such role **through monitoring and reporting on both actions impeding humanitarian access and targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure** or by assigning such responsibility to the AU High-Level Panel on Sudan.

Admittedly, any effective effort for achieving any measure of cessation of hostilities requires at the very least two conditions. The first is to achieve diplomatic consensus and align efforts of all those with influence, leverage, and interest to halt this downward spiral of the situation in Sudan. The second and based on the first condition is to ensure cessation of the flow of support to the two sides. In this respect, the PSC may also find ways of working with IGAD and the UN to secure the required measures for stopping the flow of arms and to squeeze the funding sources of these warring parties.

On the humanitarian front, Sudan now has the hallmark of being the worst conflict-induced humanitarian crisis on the continent. Tens of thousands lost their lives. In various instances, the loss of these lives was a result of mass killings. The continued fighting has left at least 8.2 million [displaced](#). According to the World Food Program (WFP), there are approximately 25 million people in need of assistance [classifying](#) the humanitarian condition as 'the world's largest hunger crisis'. According to UNICEF, the war in Sudan also led to the world's worst child displacement crisis. Despite the

staggering and growing dire humanitarian situation, access to humanitarian assistance remains hugely impeded. Indicating the catastrophic trend of the worsening of the humanitarian situation, the Famine Early Warning System Network warned of an impending famine threatening parts of West Darfur, Khartoum, and the Greater Darfur region. According to the WFP, nearly five million individuals are on the brink of experiencing famine.

Significant outcomes in reducing the humanitarian crisis were seen days after the adoption of a UNSC [resolution](#), following which the government of Sudan decided to [open humanitarian corridors](#) via four routes, namely: Tina crossing from Chad to El Fasher; Port Sudan to El Fasher via Atbara; Red Sea Road to Port Sudan via Egypt; Wadi Halfa-Dongola crossing; and Renk to Kosti via land route from South Sudan. These recent developments are also supplemented by this week's [Humanitarian Conference](#) on Sudan held in Paris, France which saw the pledging of the reported 2 billion Euro plus an additional 900 thousand to aid the UN in providing humanitarian assistance in Sudan and neighboring countries.

Regarding the peacemaking efforts, the first of the issues that the PSC is expected to deliberate on is the work that the AU High-Level Panel has undertaken thus far and how it plans to execute its mandate. Since the start of its mandate last February, the Ad Hoc Panel has been on diplomatic [tours](#), engaging various Sudanese stakeholders and regional actors. The diplomatic missions involved the engagement of the panel with the conflict actors, both senior officials from the SAF as well as representatives from the RSF. In addition to its engagement with the armed forces, the panel also ensured to convene consultations with key regional stakeholders including civil society actors, academics, humanitarian actors, political actors and other armed actors involved in previous Juba Peace Agreements. The Panel's consultations also involved non-Sudanese actors with visits, among others, to Cairo and

Djibouti where the panel discussed with the League of Arab States, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the executive secretary of IGAD.

The other issue that deserves attention in terms of peacemaking efforts is the approach to the peace process, most notably in terms of the existence of multiple processes that are not necessarily complementary. The efforts thus far involved initiatives by Saudi Arabia and the US focusing on ceasefire negotiations, by IGAD seeking to bring the leaders of the two warring parties and by the AU seeking to facilitate the wider political track of the peace process. None of these various initiatives achieved any meaningful breakthrough. It is expected that the US and Saudi Arabia seek to relaunch talks in Jeddah. Indications are that, unlike previous processes, this time around the scope of Jeddah talks may not be exclusively limited to securing a ceasefire. Additionally, it is expected to expand the participation of key regional and international actors including Egypt, UAE, the AU, IGAD and UN who were not represented in the earlier Jeddah talks.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The PSC may welcome the establishment and operationalization of the AU High-Level Panel on Sudan. It may welcome the diplomatic tours that the Panel undertook for consulting Sudanese and other regional stakeholders. As such, the PSC may request the Panel, pending the start of the political peace process within the framework of the AU/IGAD roadmap, to actively participate and engage in all the processes on Sudan. It may also request for the Panel to identify an action plan on a way forward from their field mission. Concerning the armed conflict, the PSC may express its concerns over the continued fighting underscoring that there will be no military solution to the crises in Sudan and calling for the actors to abide by the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan and the recent call for a cessation of hostilities. The PSC may urge an end to the intensification of the fighting and

request the conflict actors to contain the proliferation of support from armed groups. The PSC may call on countries backing the two warring parties to end all support to either side of the war as a necessary condition for averting the risk of the situation in Sudan getting completely out of control with dire consequences for the region and international peace and security. The PSC may wish to request for the AU Commission and the AU High-Level Panel to institute a monitoring, documenting and reporting mechanism as useful diplomatic leverage for promoting collaboration of the parties in complying with international humanitarian law rules and avoiding the deliberate targeting of civilians and indiscriminate use of force. On the humanitarian front, the PSC may welcome the initiative taken by the warring parties to facilitate the opening of humanitarian corridors. It may call for the reinforcement of the protection of humanitarian corridors by calling for the establishment of internationally protected humanitarian corridors. The PSC may also welcome the recent announcement of the pledge of 20 million by donors to facilitate aid in Sudan. In this regard, it may call on follow through on pledges made and delivering on the pledges urgently.