

Briefing on the situation in the Sudan

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Tomorrow (16 March) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 985th session on the transitional situation in Sudan. The session is also expected to serve as a preparation for Council's upcoming field visit to Sudan scheduled to take place from 30 March to 1 April. Apart from the opening statement of the Chairperson of the PSC, Bankole Adeoye, the new Commissioner for Political Affairs and Peace and Security will deliver his maiden remarks. It is also expected that the Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson and Head of the AU Liaison Office in Sudan, Mohamed Belaichi will give a briefing to the PSC. The representative of Sudan is also expected to make statements both as representative of Sudan and as Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The new Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), Volker Perthes, is also scheduled to make statement.

It is to be recalled that the PSC requested the Chairperson of the AU Commission to regularly brief the Council on the situation in the Sudan, in particular, on the implementation of the Political Agreement and the Constitutional Document. Tomorrow's briefing is expected to provide an update on the overall political situation, the evolution of the transition including the implementation of the Juba peace agreement since PSC's last session on Sudan held during its 952nd meeting.

The country marked the second anniversary of the revolution in December 2020. Since the PSC's last session, significant progress has been observed, although the transition continues

to face serious challenges, thus remaining fragile. On 14 December 2020, Sudan has been removed from the US List of State Sponsors of Terrorism. This has paved the way for the transitional government to receive much-needed financial and economic assistance to revive the country's ailing economy and for the country to engage in negotiations to secure debt relief. It also boosts the position of the civilian component of the transitional government.

An important milestone has also been achieved in the implementation of the Juba peace agreement. The Announcement on 8 February by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok of the formation of the expanded new Cabinet resulted in the inclusion in the transitional government of the representatives of the various opposition group formations in the structures of the transitional government. The new cabinet includes, among others, the Darfuri rebel leader Gibril Ibrahim as Finance Minister and, Mariam Sadiq al-Mahdi, a leader of the Umma Party, as Foreign Minister. Some are also represented in the Sovereign Council, the other major component of the transitional government.

Following these changes in the composition of the transitional government, the expanded transitional government adopted a new political agenda committing to addressing the serious economic challenges affecting the public, security sector reform, transitional justice, gender and youth empowerment.

Despite such progress, the transitional process continues to face major challenges. In terms of the implementation of the transitional timelines including in the Constitutional Document, the call of the PSC for the establishment of the transitional legislative council, an important milestone envisaged in the Constitutional Document and the Juba Peace Agreement, remains unmet as various deadlines, including that of 25 February have been missed. The delay is said to be because of ongoing consultations on the distribution of seats among Sudanese political forces, including the signatories of

the Agreement. The appointment of substantive state governments expected to take place on 15 February was not met. Despite the provision in the transitional agreement for the Military to handover the chairship of the Sovereign Council, there remain uncertainties.

In the political front, one of the major priorities for the transitional government is to advance the peace process by bringing on board non-signatory armed opposition movements, including the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North-Abdel Aziz al-Hilu faction and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Abdul Wahid al-Nur faction. The recent meeting between the Sovereign Council Chairman, Lieutenant General Abdelfattah Burhan, with Mr. Al-Hilu, and the latter's declaration to unilaterally extend the cessation of hostilities for five months is encouraging in this regard. There is also the issue of addressing challenges affecting the relationship of the civilian and military arms of the transitional government.

The dire economic challenges facing the country is another major area of concern for the transitional process. The Transitional Government of Sudan rolled out its economic recovery plan, 'Sudan Economic Revival Plan 2019-2030' to address the economic challenges facing the country. With the withdrawal of subsidies leading to spike in cost of living, thousands of Sudanese took to the streets to protest in Khartoum and other major cities to express their frustration over the deteriorating socioeconomic condition and criticized the performance of the transitional Government. Following the formation of the new cabinet, the transitional government took the most difficult decision to float the currency exchange rate in line with a reform programme agreed last year with the International Monetary Fund. Despite the adoption of mitigating economic measures including safety net programs, the economic situation remains an area that requires major effort, including via international support.

In terms of the security situation, intercommunal violence in

Darfur continues to threaten the lives of civilians, while UNAMID continues its drawdown and exit. Recent incidents resulted in the death, injury, and displacement of civilians. These incidents have raised questions over the withdrawal of UNAMID. Displaced people who protested against these incidents have in fact called for the mission to stay. UNAMID is expected to complete its withdrawal by the end of June this year and UNITAMS that took over from UNAMID with a mandate to assist Sudan in its transition and peacebuilding process is already operational. Highlighting the precarious security situation and fragility of the transitional process, on 9 March Prime Minister Hamdok survived an assassination attempt, second time in a year.

The other major challenge with not-insignificant implications for the transitional process is the broader regional geopolitical dynamics. Tensions between the Sudan and Ethiopia along their common border has been a matter of serious concern. There has been calls for the two countries to ensure a peaceful resolution of their differences regarding the demarcation of their common border. Countries in the neighborhood and beyond have also offered to mediate. On his part, Chairperson Moussa Faki had sent his Principal Advisor Professor Mohamed el Hacem Ould Lebatt to Khartoum to undertake consultation with the transition authorities. But there has been calls for the AU to be engaged in assisting Ethiopia and Sudan, including through its border programme. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in his recent report to the UNSC on the Sudan, also urged the leaders of Ethiopia and the Sudan to de-escalate the situation, ensure the safety of those living in the area and work towards a common solution. Other regional dynamics include the negotiations over the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

The expected outcome of the meeting is a communique. The PSC is expected to welcome the progress made in the implementation of the transitional process including, the formation of the

new transitional cabinet and the expanded Sovereign Council in implementing the Juba agreement. It would also welcome the removal of Sudan from the US List of State Sponsors of Terrorism and call on the international community to extend the much needed financial and economic support to Sudan to ensure the success of the transition. The PSC may also urge the various components of the transitional government to overcome their differences and enhance working together in the implementation of the transitional process. It may also reiterate its earlier call for the formation of the Transitional Legislative Council in line with the Constitutional Document.

In terms of the peace process, the PSC is expected to urge those armed movements that remain outside the peace process to commit to negotiations that will lead to a fully inclusive and sustainable peace in the Sudan. The PSC may express concern over spike in violence in Drafur with dire consequences to civilians. The PSC may also urge express concern about the escalation in border tensions between the Sudan and Ethiopia and call on the leaders of Ethiopia and the Sudan to de-escalate the situation and work towards finding an amicable solution to the border issue through dialogue and negotiation. In order to enhance AU's support for the transitional process, the PSC may call on the deployment of needs assessment process for identifying areas of post-conflict reconstruction and development support by the AU and the need for close working arrangement between the AU and UNITAMS.