

Briefing on the Situation in Sudan

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Tomorrow (30 January) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to receive a briefing on the situation in the Sudan. The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission (SRCC) and Head of the AU Liaison Office to Sudan Mohamed Belaiche is expected to brief the Council. Also invited for addressing the Council are Sudan, expected to be represented at the level of State Minister for Foreign Affairs and the US Special Envoy to Sudan, Donald Booth.

The main focus of the session is on how to address the economic challenges facing Sudan and guarantee the success of the transitional process in Sudan. Since 1993, the United States has kept Sudan and its former leader, Omar al-Bashir on its state sponsors of terrorism list. This has serious consequences for the transition in Sudan. Most notably, it directly affects the economy that is in desperate need of revitalization based principally on international support and economic cooperation.

The transitional government has inherited a very weak economy suffering from the nearly \$60 billion debt burden, widespread unemployment and rising inflation and cost of living. With very little tools at its disposal for addressing the plethora of economic woes facing the country, Sudan needs major external economic support. Prime Minister Abdela Hamdok says the country requires up to \$10 billion to stabilise the currency and help the administration tackle key challenges over the next two years.

Sudan however cannot mobilize international economic support

while it is still on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. In December, Hamdok was on an official visit to the US aiming at engaging US authorities on the normalization of relations between the two countries and the removal of Sudan from the state sponsor of terrorism list. In a speech that he delivered during his stay in the US, he stated that Sudan's removal from the list of state sponsors of terrorism 'has a lot of bearing on so many processes, not to mention debt and investment but also opening the country at large,' and 'unless it is addressed, all these other processes will not take place'. Many agree that removing Sudan from the list will open the door for access to essential financial support and address the economic stress facing Sudan.

During tomorrow's session the representative of Sudan is expected to provide further details on the challenges facing Sudan and how keeping Sudan in the US state sponsors of terrorism affects the transitional process in Sudan. Also, of importance for the PSC is update by the Sudanese representative about the outcome of Hamdok's visit to the US that took place last December and measures Sudan is taking for getting its removal from the list.

The two countries have agreed to exchange Ambassadors for the first time in 23 years. Hamdok said some progress has been made during his visit to the U.S., but he admitted that the process of removing Sudan from the U.S. terrorism list could take time. During a visit to Sudan, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy who visited Sudan recently was asked about this issue and he said, "we see a very positive partner with whom we can do business. We have active negotiations going on in a number of areas. We are optimistic".

During tomorrow's meeting, the PSC is expected to hear from Booth on US's assessment of the support required for forestalling the collapse of the transitional process in Sudan and the role of the removal of Sudan from US state sponsors of

terrorism list. Most specifically, PSC member states would be keen to know the conditions that are required for getting the removal of Sudan from the list and the plan of the US for helping Sudan meet those conditions. Some of the conditions that senior officials of the US State Department indicated for removing Sudan from the list include: more cooperation on counterterrorism; improved human rights protections, including freedom of religion and the press; increased humanitarian access; ending fighting and conflicts with rebels within Sudan; showing that Sudan has ceased supporting terrorism, ensuring that no Sudanese weapons in terrorist hands; and compensating those affected by the terrorist incidents for which responsibility is attributed to Sudan. Hamdok is reported to have said that the two points still under discussion are the cooperation of Sudan regarding the war on terrorism and compensations to U.S. victims of the terrorist attacks against U.S. embassies.

The last time the PSC met was in September when it decided to lift the suspension of the participation of Sudan in the AU's activities following the establishment of the transitional government and the appointment of the new prime minister. The PSC had called for the lifting of all economic and financial sanctions on Sudan, including removing Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, with a view to enhancing the economic activities of the country and encouraging foreign investments. In the same meeting, the PSC agreed to continue to closely monitor the development of the situation in Sudan and requested the Chairperson of the AU Commission to regularly brief the Council on the situation in Sudan, in particular, on the implementation of the Political Agreement and the Constitutional Document. During tomorrow's meeting, the SRCC Belaiche is expected to provide the PSC update on the progress and challenges in the Sudanese transitional process. It has been more than five months since the Sudanese transitional government was formed, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, it has taken series of

measures aimed at addressing the country's multiple and complex challenges. The transitional government has recently adopted a general framework that guides its work and sets out its key priorities. In this regard, it has been working to put an end to war as a matter of priority with a view to building a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the country.

Some encouraging progress is registered. Prime Minister Hamdock has visited rebel held areas in a gesture of peace, which was widely welcomed. Most recently, the transitional government signed a peace deal with the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) for bringing an end to the conflict affecting the two areas of Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

It is expected that SRCC Belaiche will also address the issue of how the economic situation affects the transitional process. Sudan continues to face enormous socio-economic difficulties; addressing the grievances of the people and giving the Sudanese youth a sense of hope and future is a herculean task for the transitional government. In this regard, it has been taking series of steps to revive the moribund economy by undertaking reform measures to address macro-economic and structural imbalances.

Prime Minister Hamdock has been visiting countries of the region and beyond in a renewed diplomatic engagement. At the 13th Ordinary Summit of IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa in November last year, Sudan was elected to the Chairmanship of IGAD replacing Ethiopia. At this important juncture, Sudan certainly needs all the support from the international community to surmount its current political, security and socio-economic challenges and meet the needs and aspirations of its people. Kuwait is said to be planning to host an international donors Conference in support of Sudan in April/May. The Conference is expected to mobilize financial contributions to assist the country's economic reform efforts.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The PSC is expected to review the progress in the implementation of the political agreement in the Sudan and welcome the positive steps taken by the transitional government over the past several months. Given the key role that the AU together with Ethiopia played in facilitating the signing of this agreement, the PSC is expected to urge the US to play its key role of preventing the derailment of the transitional process in Sudan and the peace and security risks that it entails by removing Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The PSC may in particular call for a plan with specific timeline and agreed parameters underpinned by firm commitments to be jointly drawn up by the US and Sudan towards achieving this objective of removal from the list and facilitating access by Sudan to economic support including for addressing its debt burden. On its part, the PSC may express its commitment to support Sudan towards realizing the assurances that it gives for meeting the conditions for its removal from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The PSC may also welcome the peace process including the signing in Juba, South Sudan of the peace agreement with the SPLM-N. The PSC may recognize the enormous challenges that the country continues to face and reiterate its call to bilateral and international partners to mobilize assistance in support of the Sudan. In this context, it may welcome the plan by Kuwait to hold an international donors conference.