

Briefing on Transnational Organized Crimes and Security in Africa

Automatic Heading TextDate | 6 May 2022

Tomorrow (6 May) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to convene its 1082nd session on Transnational Organized Crime and Security in Africa.

Following the opening remark by Ambassador Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, Permanent Representative of Cameroon and the Chairperson of the PSC for May, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to make a statement.

Representatives from the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), the Secretary General of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) are also expected to brief the PSC. A representative from the AUC Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development may also deliver a statement.

Tomorrow's session is the second meeting to be convened by the PSC after it decided on its 845th meeting held on 25th April 2019 to hold an annual session on the theme 'Transnational Organized Crime and Peace and Security in Africa'. The PSC noted its deep concern over the rise of transnational organized crime in Africa in its several sessions including on thematic sessions that are linked to the issue including terrorism, illicit economy and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

During the 731st meeting held on 8 November 2017, the PSC

underlined 'the direct linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime, particularly in situations where state institutions are weak and lack the necessary capacity to effectively discharge their constitutional mandates'. Among others, organized crime has become a source of finance for terrorist groups and this has contributed to the proliferation of violent extremist groups on the continent.

Similarly, on its 832nd meeting held on 14 March 2019; the PSC received a briefing from the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (RECSA) on the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and its Impact on Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020. The PSC, among others, underlined the link between transnational organized crime, the proliferation of weapons and corruption, illicit financial flows, poaching and illegal exploitation of natural resources. In this regard, the PSC encouraged the Member States to redouble their efforts aimed at promoting good governance, transparency, accountability and a high level of professionalism across all sections of society, including governance of security and defense institutions.

The Organized Crime Index report by INTERPOL ENACT (Enhancing African capacity to respond more effectively to transnational organized crime) in its 2021 report concludes that the majority of Africa's population almost two-thirds (60.9%) live in countries with high levels of organized crime. The report also stressed that the increasing threat shows no signs of slowing down. In this regard, the PSC on the 845th session, also notes with serious concern 'over the growing threat posed by organized transnational crime, particularly its increasingly direct linkages and collusion with terrorism and violent extremism, particularly in situations where state institutions are not up to the level of organization, performance and equipment commensurate to this growing threat

to peace and security in Africa'. To tackle the crime, the PSC underscored in its several communiqués that, member states have the primary responsibility to fight against transnational organized crimes and terrorism. The council in its 845th session even urges Member States to take necessary steps to domesticate all AU and international instruments regarding the fight against transnational organized crime, including money laundering notably by terrorist groups.

Along with AU member states, the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) plays a critical role in providing systematic and structured cooperation among police agencies in the continent to fight against transnational organized crime. AFRIPOL was established as a mechanism for police cooperation for Member States of the AU. Its main objective is to establish a framework for police cooperation at the strategic, operational and tactical levels between Member States' police institutions.

So far, AFRIPOL facilitated enhanced cooperation among the police agencies of AU Member states and 48 Member States have established their AFRIPOL National Liaison Offices as provided for in the AFRIPOL Statute. The AFRIPOL Secretariat has trained the heads of the National Liaison Offices on their roles and responsibilities. As part of the engagement with the AU Policy Organs, the AFRIPOL Secretariat also briefed the PSC at its 845th meeting. The PSC, among others, commended the efforts by AFRIPOL to build and strengthen the capacities of the police agencies of the Member States, and underscored the need to further enhance the capacity of national justice systems, cooperation between and among border police and financial intelligence units, as well as to involve civil society and local communities in efforts aimed at preventing and combating terrorism and organized transnational crime.

However, despite AU institutions and member states effort to fight against Transnational Organized Crimes in Africa, the

fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on the intensification of transnational organized crime in the continent. Institutional responses to stop the spread of the pandemic caused extensive losses for legitimate businesses and, despite lockdowns and restrictions on movement, actors involved in organized crimes were able to adapt more effectively than legal entities. According to ENACT report, organized crime groups in Africa have adapted their modus operandi to the new COVID-19 realities, finding new routes for illicit trafficking and making more use of cargo shipments. Correspondingly, the report noted the surge in illicit trade with fake COVID-19 cures and vaccines or falsified medicines. In this regard, the INTERPOL report has also underlined the pandemic has made illicit medication markets in Africa even more attractive to organized crime groups. This concerning emerging trend would be of interest to PSC members.

It is also worth to note the interlinkage between active conflict and the upsurge of transnational Organized crime in the continent. According to ENACT assessment, countries scoring highest for organized crime often experience conflict or some form of violence, insurrection, terrorist activity or civil unrest. Conflict also diverts much needed resources from projects that contribute towards social cohesion and also from enhancing security infrastructure that is able to contain organized crime and various security threats.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The Council may express deep concern over the growing rate of transnational organized crime in the continent and its relationship to the rise and expansion of terrorism in the continent. It may underline the need to strengthen member states' capacities of their national security institutions. It may also call upon member States' Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) to enhance collaborations in securing and managing borders to combat transnational organized crimes. The Council is expected to

urge Member States to ratify and sign existing AU and other relevant international instruments on the prevention and combat of terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization and organized transnational crime. The PSC may also stress the need to strengthen the capacity of the specialized agencies including CISSA and AFRIPOL to fulfil their mandates effectively and to enhance their horizontal cooperation to create more synergy.