

# Community Responses to Security Challenges in the Continent

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Date | 21 July 2023

Tomorrow (21 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1163<sup>rd</sup> Session to discuss its position on the topic of Community Responses to Security Challenges in the Continent. The session will be held virtually at the Ministerial level.

The Ministerial session will be chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Senegal and the PSC Chair for the month of July 2023, Aïssata Tall Sall. Following the opening remarks by the Chair of the PSC, Bankole Adeoye, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), will make an introductory statement. Vasu Gounden, the executive director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), is also expected to provide a briefing. Representative of the AU Economic, Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) may also brief the PSC.

Tomorrow's session is taking place at a time when in the context of the ongoing war in Sudan, civil society and community groups mobilized exemplary response to mitigate the impact of the fighting on civilians and to prevent various communities from being sucked into the conflict. They helped to identify safe passages for enabling civilians caught in the cross fire of the fighting to escape from harm's way into safer areas. They organized humanitarian assistance involving the provision of food and medical help for civilians cut off from access to basic necessities due to the heavy fighting. Leaders of local communities in parts of Sudan such as Darfur

signed local peace agreements to avoid being drawn into the fighting. Similarly, various civic actors rejected the war and campaigned for keeping Sudanese people from taking side in the war that they never chose.

Such self-organizing community initiatives that emerged organically to fill the void left by national and international peacebuilding efforts are not unique to Sudan. The recent offensive in Somalia against Al Shabaab drew on and mostly organized around the initiative of local communities. These experiences highlight the increasing importance of recognizing the role of civic groups and local community actors in peace and security.

The need for expanding the policy space for enhancing the role of communities in peace and security arises from complexity of contemporary threats to peace and security and the inadequacy of governmental and inter-governmental responses to these threats. The rise of protests and riots in the context of political contestations and spike in costs of living amid expanding inequality in various parts of the continent also necessitate mobilizing local and national capacities and infrastructures of peace. PSC's dedication of this session to community responses to security challenges is accordingly a welcome recognition of the need for tapping into and using ***a whole of society approach***.

Although this issue has not been previously discussed in this specific form, past PSC sessions touched on it under the themes 'Women, Peace and Security (WPS)', 'Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in Africa', 'the Annual Consultative Meeting between the PSC and Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and the AU Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC)'. These PSC sessions stressed that engaging all stakeholders in peace processes is not solely concerned with improving security at the local level, and should not be viewed as separate from national and regional security provisions.

At its [728<sup>th</sup>](#), [803<sup>rd</sup>](#), [887<sup>th</sup>](#) and [987<sup>th</sup>](#) sessions, the PSC, drawing on, the UNSCR 1325 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month, underlined the crucial role of women in decision-making positions and in every stage of peace processes, including conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace support operations and in post-conflict reconstruction, development and peace building. While there are thirty (30) countries in Africa that have [adopted](#) a national action plan on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325, sixteen (16) of those action plans require updating. On the other hand, only less than half of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have adopted any strategy, guideline, or action plan on WPS. At the AU level, the 2018 AU Continental Results Framework (CRF) tool that was adopted to monitor the implementation commitments of WPS by both the Member States and the AU Commission was only reported once. As such, the PSC may explore ways to strengthen the role of CSOs in monitoring the CRF.

On promoting the role of youth, institutional measures taken at the level of the AU include the launch of the AU Youth for Peace Africa Program, the institutionalization of the session on 'Youth, Peace and Security in Africa', and the adoption of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security with its 10-year implementation plan. The African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) were also appointed at the PSC's request during its 807<sup>th</sup> session. Implementation and integration of these in peace processes remains slow. As such, ***it would be of interest for PSC members*** to focus in tomorrow's session on the question of how to use these frameworks for the involvement of youth in formulating responses to specific conflict situations and in deploying mediation, peace-making and peace support operations in relation to specific conflict situations. Tomorrow's session would also benefit from discussions to explore ways in which member states can integrate mechanisms

of engaging African youth in their national YPS action plans, particularly in efforts related to early warning, preventive diplomacy and post conflict reconstruction and development.

Outside of the focus on specific category of members of society, of particular significance for tomorrow's session is the effectiveness of the existing framework for the engagement with CSOs. This is important considering that CSOs often work at the grassroots level, where they can effectively engage and mobilize local communities in peace building, reconciliation and inter-communal cohesion. The outcomes of the retreats of the PSC in Livingstone and Maseru as well as the two consultative sessions (2022 & 2023) have given recognition that including communities in security responses can be an effective tool. However, for optimizing the role of civic groups and local community organizations including in national and regional peace efforts, ***there is a need for developing tools for leveraging their roles in AU's efforts for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.***

Additionally, during the ministerial session, the PSC is expected to consider measures for effective civil-military collaboration in the implementation of peace support operations (PSOs) in Africa. Coming against the background of recent opposition from local community members against the UN Mission in DRC and the one in Mali, the importance of the relationship between local communities and peace support operations cannot be overemphasized. Effective coordination can help to create a shared understanding of the situation, enabling both military and civilian actors to work towards common goals. Additionally, it can help to build trust between military and civilian actors, as well as local populations. Therefore, the PSC members may consider exploring comprehensive civilian-military cooperation, recognizing the need for an approach that involves all stakeholders, including local communities.

While the format of outcome of the session is not known during

the production of this 'Insight', it is expected to be a communiqué. The PSC may acknowledge the need for a multidimensional and complex nature of contemporary security challenges and accordingly underscore the need for a holistic and inclusive approach to address the root causes of conflict and all security crises, recognizing inextricable nexus between peace, security and socio-economic development. The PSC may request the AU Commission, as part of making the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) fit for contemporary security challenges, to develop **AU strategy on community response to conflicts** with a view to supporting and leveraging the role of non-state actors. It may also in this respect emphasize the importance of building and mobilizing **national capacities and infrastructures of peace** with civil society and community organizations including women and youth, traditional and religious leaders playing a central role. The PSC may further request that the AU Commission and RECs/RMs be deliberate about the inclusion of women and youth in the planning and deployment of mediation, peace-making and other similar peace processes. The PSC may also call on member states to engage and make use of the tools of the continental conflict prevention framework, including most notably the voluntary country structural vulnerability and resilience assessment (CSVRS). As part of enhancing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of AU and RECs/RMs peace processes, the PSC may also request that such peace processes including peace support operations develop and implement robust mechanism for close coordination with and active consultation of local communities.