

Consideration of Mid-year report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Elections in Africa

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Tomorrow (24 January), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1194th session to consider the mid-year report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on elections in Africa, covering the period from July to December 2023 and providing an outlook for 2024.

Following the opening statement of the Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Amma A. Twum-Amoah, Permanent Representative of Ghana to the AU, Bankole Adeoye, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), is expected to present the half year report. Statements are also expected from the representatives of Member States that organized elections in the second half of 2023, namely Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Liberia, Madagascar, Egypt, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The Chairperson's mid-year report on elections in Africa is in line with the PSC's decision at its 424th session of March 2014 to receive regular briefings on national elections in Africa. The last time the Chairperson presented the half year report was during PSC's 1165th session held on 31 July 2023, capturing the outcomes of elections organized between January and June 2023. As a continuation of this update, tomorrow's briefing report will cover elections conducted between July and December 2023 while providing a snapshot of elections held in

or planned for the first half of 2024. The report is also expected to shed light on electoral and political governance trends observed during the period under review. In addition, PSC may follow up on the initiatives on the Annual Report on Elections in Africa and the Documentary on AU Election Observation Mission (AUEOM), both scheduled for publication and dissemination in the third quarter of 2023.

In the latter part of 2023, seven Member States—Zimbabwe, Gabon, Eswatini, Liberia, Madagascar, Egypt, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—conducted presidential and/or parliamentary elections. AU deployed election observers to all these countries, except Gabon, to assess the electoral process. During the review period, incumbents emerged victorious in all presidential elections with the exception of Liberia, which witnessed a peaceful transfer of power. The re-election of President Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe, President Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar, and President Félix Tshisekedi of DRC also marks their final term in office as stipulated by their respective constitutions.

Despite the generally calm atmosphere in which the elections were conducted, the outcomes in the majority of cases turned out to be highly contentious, indicating a worrisome trend regarding the credibility of the electoral process in the continent. In some cases, such as in Madagascar and the Comoros, elections were marred by boycotts and low turnout.

On 23 August 2023, Zimbabwe held Harmonized elections, covering both presidential and national assembly. The incumbent President, Emmerson Mnangagwa of the ruling ZANU-PF party, was declared winner with 52.6% of the vote against 44% for his main contender, Nelson Chamisa of Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), according to official results announced by the Electoral Commission. Chamisa rejected the result, alleging irregularities. A preliminary statement by AU-COMESA Election Observation Mission (EOM) concluded that the elections were conducted, in a 'generally peaceful and

transparent manner despite logistical challenges'. The SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM), however, expressed reservations, stating that 'Some aspects of the Harmonized Elections fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)'.

The 26 August general elections in Gabon took a dramatic turn when the military seized power just hours after Gabon's election commission announced incumbent Ali Bongo's victory for a third term as a President in a disputed elections, with a reported 64.27% of the vote. Held without the presence of international observers, including from AU, the elections and its outcome were deeply contested. As a form of a palace or a family coup, the military in using the election outcome to intervene confined itself to removing Bongo. In avoiding the option of facilitating proper auditing of the election and make course correction paving the way for democratic change, the junta ensured continuity of the old regime minus Bongo. According to the tentative timetable of the two-year transition period the junta unveiled, elections are anticipated to take place in August 2025, while a new constitution will be put to a referendum in December 2024.

Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Eswatini held 'peaceful' parliamentary election on 29 September 2023. This election took place against the backdrop of the violent pro-democracy protests that had shaken the country in 2021/2022 and the brutal murder of prominent human rights activist and lawyer Thulani Maseko. It is to be recalled that SADC issued statement calling for independent investigation into Maseko's killing.

In November, voters in Liberia and Madagascar went to the polls to elect their leaders. Liberia witnessed yet another successful election after the incumbent President George Weah conceded defeat to opposition leader Joseph Boakai and hence paving the way for another democratic and peaceful transfer of

power. Boakai emerged triumphant over Weah in a closely contested two-round race that saw a record voter turnout, securing 50.64% of the vote against Weah's 49.36%.

In Madagascar's Presidential election, the incumbent President Andry Rajoelina was declared winner with 59% of the vote in an election marked by opposition boycott and low turnout. Ten out of the 13 Presidential candidates reportedly boycotted the election due to concerns over the credibility of the election and controversy regarding the validity of Rajoelina's candidacy due to questions surrounding his nationality.

The other high stake election during the review period was the 20 December general elections in DRC. The incumbent President Félix Tshisekedi has been declared winner in a landslide victory – a result rejected by the opposition and challenged by local independent observers but upheld by the constitutional court. Domestic and international missions highlighted significant logistical challenges, which compelled the electoral commission to extend the voting for an additional day. Despite the various logistical challenges and the irregularities surrounding the elections, regional bodies and the AU issued their congratulatory message to President Tshisekedi.

Earlier on 10-12 December, Egypt also conducted a presidential election in which the incumbent President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi emerged victorious, with an overwhelming 89.6% of the vote, as announced by the National Elections Authority in an election lacked serious competition and held in an environment in which the incumbent's victory was almost a foregone conclusion. The preliminary statement of the joint AU-COMESA election observation mission recommended to Egypt to 'encourage all political parties to actively participate in the electoral process and ensure adequate representation at polling stations to enhance transparency and credibility.'

In 2024, Africa is set to experience a jam-packed election

calendar, with over 20 Presidential and/or parliamentary elections anticipated to unfold. The electoral processes in the Comoros and Senegal are likely to grab the attention of Members of the PSC. The first election of the year took place in the Comoros, featuring both presidential and gubernatorial contests on 14 January. The electoral commission announced the re-election of the incumbent President Azali Assoumani, who is also current chairperson of the AU, securing 62.97% of the vote. Despite this announcement, the opposition has vehemently rejected the election results, alleging fraud and calling for the annulment of the outcome. Authorities reported a shocking low voter turnout of 16%, a figure contested by the opposition, who view the significant disparity in reported turnout between the presidential and regional governor contests, conducted simultaneously, as indicative of electoral irregularities. This development has led to heightened tensions and violent protests in the capital Moroni and elsewhere, prompting the government to impose curfew on 18 January.

Senegal's presidential election, slated for 25 February, is highly anticipated as it unfolds against the backdrop of the tumultuous final years of President Macky Sall's tenure, characterized by deadly protests over the conviction of prominent opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko, and speculation that President Sall might seek a third term or is bent on playing king maker. In July, Sall ruled out seeking re-election. Yet, the political saga surrounding Sonko and most notably the extraordinary decision of dissolving Sonko's political party have casted long shadow over the fairness of the electoral context.

Between May and August, South Africa is poised to hold general elections, anticipated to be the most fiercely contested in the nation's democratic history. The Presidential election in Mauritania, scheduled for 22 June, is also interesting to watch, with President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani vying for

re-election in his final term amid a resounding victory for his EI Insaf ruling party in the parliamentary election of May 2023. Togo is also expected to organize its legislative elections within the first half of the year.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. PSC is expected to adopt the report of the chairperson of the commission on Elections in Africa for the period of July-December 2023 and the outlook for first half of 2024. It is also expected to congratulate those Member States that organized elections during the review period, with a particular mention of Liberia for both the relatively credible elections and the concession of defeat by the incumbent that paved the way for peaceful transfer of power. However, it may also express its concerns over persistent challenges faced by African elections, notably election boycotts, low voter turnouts, and controversies arising from the outcomes of elections, which are detrimental to peace, security, and governance of the continent. In this context, the PSC may take the opportunity to address the escalating tension in the Comoros subsequent to the announcement of election results, as well as election disputes in DRC. As majority of Member States currently undergoing political transitions are poised to undertake elections this year, as per the agreed timelines, PSC may consider operationalizing effective mechanisms to enhance its engagement with these countries and monitor progress towards the organization of the elections, collaborating closely with relevant regional mechanisms. In relation to constitutional manipulation, PSC may also reiterate the importance of the AU finalizing and adopting the guidelines on the amendment of constitutions in Africa, which would serve as a framework to ensure that constitutional amendment processes adhere to formal rules and procedures, ensuring that such amendments reflect national consensus.