

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

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Tomorrow (31 July), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1165th session to consider the mid-year report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on elections in Africa as one of its agenda items.

The session opens with the opening remarks of the Permanent Representative of Senegal to the AU and the Chairperson of the PSC for the month of July, Mohamed Lamine Thiaw. The Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to present the half year report. The representatives of Member States that held elections in the first half of 2023, namely Benin, Djibouti, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone are expected to make statements.

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 1132nd session in January of this year, covering elections conducted between July and December 2022 and outlooks for 2023. Tomorrow's briefing is expected to provide updates on the outcomes of elections conducted in the first half of 2023 (January to June) and preview of upcoming elections that are expected to take place in the second half

of 2023. It is also expected to reflect on some of the key trends observed in the continent's electoral and political governance during the period under review.

The review of elections that took place during the last six months will cover the six elections that were organized during this period. Nigeria and Sierra Leone held general elections while Benin, Djibouti, Mauritania, and Guinea Bissau organized parliamentary elections. AU deployed election observers in all these countries except Benin to assess the electoral process.

In Benin's parliamentary election, which was held on 8 January, the opposition won 28 seats in the 109-seat parliament. This marked the return of the opposition into the parliament after a four-year of absence, which bodes well to the country's democratic trajectory. On 24 February, Djibouti held its parliamentary election with the ruling coalition amassing 94 percent of the vote. AU's observers characterized the election as 'effective, peaceful and orderly', an election which the main opposition boycotted calling it a 'sham'.

The most anticipated election during the review period was perhaps the 25 February Nigeria's general election. According to AU's preliminary statement, the election was 'crucial in consolidating democracy, peace and stability' in the country despite that the election was held in a challenging economic, operational and security context. Bola Tinubu of the ruling All progressives Congress (APC) party was declared winner, though the two main opposition leaders (Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party and Peter Obi of the Labour Party) filed separate petitions to challenge the outcome of the election citing irregularities. With an overall turnout of 29 % of voters, it is reported that it is the lowest in Nigeria's democratic history. While the introduction of digital technologies for voter verification and electronic transmission of result forms was welcomed as a critical measure to enhance credibility of the electoral process, it did not function as promised by the Independent National

Electoral Commission (INEC). According to the report of one of the local observer groups, together with poor communication by INEC, incidents of violence meant to influence the electoral process and allegations of manipulation during collation of votes, the failure of technology reduced from the level of confidence that the elections were expected to garner from the public.

In the parliamentary and local elections held on 13 May in Mauritania, the EI Insaf ruling party registered a sweeping victory, grabbing 107 of 176 seats in the National Assembly, despite complaint from the opposition about rigging. The country is expected to conduct a presidential election in the coming year.

In Guinea Bissau, a coalition of opposition groups, led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), won majority of the seats in the parliament, picking up 54 of the 102 seats. The conduct of the 4 June parliamentary election in a peaceful climate and the concession of defeat by the ruling party contributes positively to the democratization process in a country that has been experiencing political turmoil, including the February 2022 coup attempt and the dissolution of the parliament in May of the same year, and the challenge of organized crime involving drug trafficking.

On the other hand, Sierra Leone's 24 June multi-tier elections (presidential, parliamentary, and local elections) were marred by 'politically motivated violence spurred by the general mistrust between the two main political parties', the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All-People's Congress (APC), according to AU observers. The incumbent President Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP was declared winner with more than 56 percent of the votes – a result rejected by the main rival Samura Kamara. Claiming 'glaring irregularities', APC announced its decision not to participate in the governance structure of the country in addition to calling for a rerun of

the election.

In relation to election outlook for the second half of 2023, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Togo, and Eswatini are among the countries that are expected to organize presidential and/or parliamentary elections. Although Libyan Government indicated readiness to organize general elections (originally scheduled for December 2021) in 2023, it is not clear whether this could happen. Rwanda's parliamentary election, which was slated for September 2023 is now rescheduled for next year.

Zimbabweans will go to the polls on 23 August to elect their president and members of both houses of the Parliament, with 2 October scheduled for runoff if required. The incumbent President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the ruling ZANU-PF party will face his main contender, Nelson Chamisa of Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), who finished second during the 2018 presidential election. Ensuring even playing field for political parties and creating a peaceful environment will remain key for credible elections in Zimbabwe.

26 August is set for Gabon's general elections where the incumbent President Ali Bongo will seek a third term, facing 14 other presidential candidates. It is to be recalled that in April of this year, the parliament voted to amend the constitution that reduced presidential term from seven to five years and turned the presidential election into a single round.

Madagascar will conduct the first round of the presidential election on 9 November while the second round is expected to take place on 20 December, if required.

DRC is also gearing up for the December 2023 general elections amidst extremely difficult security context, which indeed remains one of the biggest threats to the credibility of the polls. As elections campaign are expected to heat up in the

coming months, it is also important to ensure that such campaigns do not escalate tension with neighbouring countries, notably Rwanda. Liberians will also head to the polls in October to elect their next president as well as members of their parliament.

Togo and Eswatini will hold their parliamentary elections in the second half of the year. The timeline for Togo's election is not confirmed yet, but Eswatini is set to conduct its election in September, which will be interesting to watch as it is going to take place at the backdrop of rising political tension.

Meanwhile, Mali organized a constitutional referendum on 18 June, which was approved overwhelmingly with 97 percent of the vote. The referendum is considered as a critical step towards the 24 February 2024 election and a return to civilian rule, but some critics raises their concern that the new constitution strengthens the role of the President. Although Mali slatted October and November 2023 for the first and second rounds of parliamentary elections, it appears that the timelines are likely to be revised. On the other hand, CAR went ahead with the controversial constitutional referendum on 30 July while suspending the preparations for local elections (the first since 1988), initially scheduled for July, until September of this year. If approved, the new constitution will remove the two-term limit and clear the deck for the incumbent President Faustin Touadera to seek re-election in 2025 for a third-term. This requires the attention of the PSC as the third term bid through contested amendment of constitutional clause on presidential term limits is contrary to the position the AU seeks to advance on third termism as outlined in the Accra Declaration and may trigger instability and worsen the already fragile situation in this country.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. PSC is expected to adopt the report of the chairperson of the Commission on Elections in Africa for the period of January-

June 2023 and the outlook for second half of the year (July-December 2023). It may congratulate those Member States that successfully conducted elections during the first half of the year while urging them to work on aspects of the electoral process that led to contestations. With respect to AU's support to Member States, it may urge the Commission to regularly deploy its initiative of the 'Return Visit' to make sure that the recommendations of its election observer missions are implemented. In relation to those Member States preparing to conduct their elections in the second half of the year, PSC may urge them to put their utmost efforts towards ensuring the conduct of credible elections in accordance with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. In light of what transpired in Niger, PSC may take the opportunity to strongly condemn the coup in the country and echo the call of the Chairperson of the AU Commission for the 'immediate and unconditional return of the felon soldiers to their barracks'. PSC may also reiterate its request for the Commission to expedite the operationalization of the PSC Sub-Committee on Sanctions pursuant to the Declaration adopted by the 16th Extraordinary Session of the AU Summit held in May 2022 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. As constitutional manipulations have continued to extend term limits, PSC may find it necessary to re-emphasize the need for the AU to finalize and adopt the AU guidelines on the amendment of constitutions in Africa to guide constitutional amendment processes adhere to formal rules and procedures and ensure that such amendments are outcomes of national consensus.