

Consideration of the Half Year Report on Elections in Africa: July to December 2022 and outlook for 2023

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Tomorrow (20 January), African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1132nd session to consider AU Commission Chairperson's half year report on elections in Africa.

The Permanent Representative of Uganda to the AU and the stand-in Chair of the PSC for the month of January, Rebeca Amuge Otengo, will deliver opening remarks while 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 second half of 2022 and those that are expected to organize elections in the first half of 2023 are expected to deliver statements. The Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) are also among the speakers during tomorrow's session.

The Chairperson's half year report on elections in Africa is in line with the PSC's decision at its 424th session of March 2014 to receive quarterly briefings on national elections in Africa. Since then, PSC has been receiving the report on a regular basis – twice a year since recent times. The last time the Chairperson presented his half year report was during PSC's 1096th session in August last year, covering elections

conducted between January and June 2022. Tomorrow's briefing is expected to provide updates on the outcomes of elections conducted in the second half of 2022 (July to December) as well as preview of upcoming elections that are expected to take place in the first half of 2023. In addition, the report is expected to reflect on some of the key trends observed in the continent's electoral and political governance.

Between July and December 2022, eight Member States organized presidential and parliamentary elections. Kenya, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea held general elections while Lesotho, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, and Senegal organized parliamentary elections. On the other hand, Tunisia organized a constitutional referendum on 25 July 2022, followed by parliamentary elections in December. AU deployed election observation mission (EOM) in all these countries except for Sao Tome and Principe to assess the electoral process. AU's newly introduced integrated post-election preventive diplomacy and mediation approach was also employed in the context of Kenya's election, which proved to be successful in Zambia and The Gambia in 2021.

One of the key positive trends likely to be highlighted by the Chairperson's report is that all the elections during the reporting period were conducted in a relatively calm political atmosphere, evidencing the deepening and consolidation of democracy in the continent. The peaceful transfer of power in Kenya was particularly notable as it turned the page on its violent electoral history. One factor contributing to the peaceful conclusion of Kenya's hotly anticipated Presidential election, held on 9 August, was the major shift in terms of candidates' mobilization strategies where campaigns were largely issue-centred as opposed to ethnicity. Opposition leader Raila Odinga's recourse to the judiciary over election dispute and his subsequent acceptance of the decision of the court that upheld William Ruto's Presidential victory is not only a sign of political maturity but also contributed to

stave off electoral violence in the country.

Majority of the elections under the reporting period were competitive. Oppositions made significant gains for instance in the parliamentary elections in Angola, Senegal, Sao Tome and Principe. Angola's MPLA ruling party was declared winner in the most hotly contested 24 August general elections, but opposition (UNITA) received 44 percent of the vote to MPLA's 51 percent. In Senegal, the President's coalition narrowly won the 31 July legislative election with 82 seats while the opposition gained 80 seats of the national assembly's 165. The opposition Independent Democratic Action (ADI) won Sao Tome and Principe's 26 September legislative elections. Similarly, the newly formed opposition Revolution for Prosperity Party (RFP) won the 7 October parliamentary elections taking 56 of the 80 seats. Yet, in some context, there is a long way to go to make the elections competitive as observed in the case of Equatorial Guinea where the incumbent President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo was re-elected for a sixth term with nearly 95 percent vote.

Some Member States also leveraged technology for voter registration and transmission of results, which indeed contributed to enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral process. A case in point is Kenya's 9 August Presidential elections, which introduced additional voter identity verification features in the Kenyan Integrated Election Management Systems (KIEMS) kit to provide for biometric and alphanumeric identification of voters on election day. This change provided the capture and transmission of images of the duly completed presidential election results forms from the polling station to the National Tallying Centre, which made provisional results publicly accessible. Similarly, Nigeria is prepared to deploy technology from voter registration to voter accreditation and result management in the upcoming general elections, boosting public confidence over the credibility of the election. Angola

also introduced diaspora voting for the first time, highlighting the importance of ensuring the participation of citizens living abroad in democratic processes.

Africa's electoral landscape has registered considerable progress, but challenges remain. One of the main challenges observed during the reporting period has been low voter turnout as starkly manifested in the context of Tunisia's constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections. The election in Tunisia may particularly interest members of the PSC considering the growing concern over the risk of democratic backsliding in that country. The new constitution that was put forward by the President Kais Saied for referendum is believed to provide sweeping power to the President while weakening the legislative and judicial branches of the government. The constitution was approved overwhelmingly but nearly 70 percent of Tunisians did not vote. Even more striking was the 17 December parliamentary elections (first round), witnessing a historical low turnout of 11.22 percent, according to the official figures. Sources indicate that this figure is perhaps the second lowest voter turnout ever recorded worldwide in an election since 1945. The second round is set for 20 January, but the low turnout in the first round could be seen as the harbinger of looming political crisis.

While many African countries are organizing periodic elections in accordance with their constitutions, some countries particularly those that are in political transitions have also failed to meet agreed timelines. Mali, South Sudan, and Sudan were supposed to organize elections in 2023 and complete transitions, but that could not materialize. After missing the planned 24 December 2021 general elections, agreement on alternative election timeframe is not in sight for Libyans as political impasse continued. Guinea Bissau also failed to organize its legislative elections on 18 December 2022, further complicating the political condition of the country.

In relation to election outlook for 2023, Several Member States are expected to hold presidential and/or parliamentary elections. Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Gabon are set to elect their Presidents while countries like Eswatini, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Djibouti, Benin are expected to conduct parliamentary elections. On the other hand, Mali is scheduled to organize constitutional referendum this March and its legislative elections around October 2023 to pave the way for the February 2024 Presidential election. Most of these countries are yet to announce the exact date for the elections. However, six of them, namely Nigeria, Benin, Djibouti, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, and Sierra Leone will hold elections in the first half of 2023. The Chairperson's half year report is likely to focus on Nigeria's Presidential election as it is going to happen in few weeks – on 25 February. Bankole is expected to brief members of the PSC about Nigeria's state of preparedness for the elections based on the report of the Special Pre-electoral Political Mission led by Phumzile MlamboNgcuka, former Deputy President of South Africa and Member of the AU Panel of the Wise, which was deployed by the Commission in November 2022.

Incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari will stepdown after two-terms in office, further consolidating Nigeria's democracy and setting good lessons to the region that is experiencing resurgence of coup and third-termism. Election preparation seems on the right track with a surge of new voter registrations, particularly among the youth. In a major shift to previous elections, the upcoming election is also witnessing credible presidential candidates outside the two parties that have been ruling Nigeria since the restoration of democratic rule in 1999. But security threats and the use of technology in some parts of the country are likely to remain key challenges.

The expected outcome is a communique. PSC may congratulate

those Member States that successfully conducted peaceful elections during the reporting period. It may particularly welcome the peaceful transfer of power in Kenya. PSC may take note of the evolving culture of holding of regular elections in the continent. PSC is also expected to express its concern over persisting challenges, weakening confidence in elections in delivering democratic change as evidenced, for example, by low voter turnout. PSC may highlight the imperative of addressing such challenge, particularly through undertaking inclusive national dialogue. It may call on those member States preparing to conduct their elections in the second half of the year, to put their utmost efforts towards ensuring the conduct of peaceful, fair, credible, and transparent elections in accordance with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. PSC may commend the AU Commission for its continued efforts in supporting Member States to hold credible elections, including through the deployment of observation mission. It may also encourage Member States to implement the recommendations provided by the election observation missions to deepen democratic elections in their respective jurisdictions. In that relation, PSC may find it important to remind AU Commission on the need to continue the practice of what is called a 'Return Visit' of the election observer team to the country where they observed elections to follow up on the implementation of AUEOM recommendations, which was first employed in November 2021 in the context of Zambia.