

Consideration of the Midyear Report of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union on the Elections in Africa (January – June 2021)

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Tomorrow (23 September) African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1034th session to consider the midyear report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the elections in Africa.

Following the opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Chad to the AU, Mahamat Ali Hassan, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to present the midyear report on elections held in the continent. Representatives of member States that organized elections during the period from January to June 2021 may deliver statements.

The midyear briefing is based on PSC's request, at its 424th meeting held in March 2014, to receive quarterly briefings on national elections in Africa as part of AU efforts towards conflict prevention on the continent. Since then, the Council has been briefed by the AUC on a regular basis. This briefing follows the previous one, which took place during the 982nd meeting in February, to highlight the outcome of elections organized between January and June 2021 and provides an outlook of the elections set to take place between July and December of this year. Apart from providing reviews and outlooks of the elections, the bi-annual briefing is also

expected to shed light on key trends in governance, patterns emerged in the conduct of elections, the electoral support and interventions made by the Commission, as well as policy recommendations.

From the 17 presidential and parliamentary elections on the AU calendar for 2021, 11 presidential and parliamentary elections, namely Uganda, Niger (runoff), Cote d'Ivoire, CAR, Congo, Djibouti, Benin, Chad, Cape Verde (parliamentary), Algeria, and Ethiopia) were conducted between January and June 2021. For the second half of the year, seven elections are organized or are expected to take place, which includes Sao Tome and Principe, Zambia, Morocco, Somalia, Cape Verde (presidential), The Gambia and Libya.

In relation to the governance issues in the continent, the midyear report captures four key trends: the increasing appeal for democratic dividends around the continent; the "choiceless" nature of electoral politics; voter apathy; and the persistent challenge of the concentration of power at the centre. These worrying governance trends are further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the quality of elections in the continent. The resurgence of unconstitutional change of government in Africa, which witnessed three military seizure of power this year alone, is also a clear indication of the 'deepening democratic deficit' that the continent is facing.

One of the positive developments witnessed in the reporting period likely to be highlighted in the report is Niger's first-ever democratic power transfer since its independence in 1960, although the attempted coup few days before the presidential inauguration signals the fragility of the democratic gains. The other positive trend is member states ability and will to stick to their electoral calendars despite the enormous challenge posed by COVID-19 pandemic and other political and security issues. Given that the PSC (for instance during its 982nd and 713th meetings) emphasized the

importance of mobilizing funds from within the continent with the view to reducing external manipulation and influence, there are encouraging trends in this regard as well. The report indicates that four of the member states that conducted elections during the reporting period 'primarily financed' their elections by national funds. The increasing participation of women and youth in the electoral process is another area of positive development though there are still limitations in the participation of the same as candidates.

Despite electoral progress in some member states, challenges to elections in Africa have persisted in the reporting period. Volatile security atmosphere not only dented the credibility of some of the elections but also affected voter turn out. Security threats, political tension, shrinking political space, opposition boycott, and low voter turnout have continued to be worrying trends affecting the elections in some member states. It is worth noting that elections conducted amid intense political climate and high opposition boycott are clear indications of deep-seated divides, highlighting the imperative of political dialogue to accompany elections.

Some elections including the April presidential election in Benin exhibited continued challenge of voter apathy. There is a need to address the factors behind this problem given that voter participation is one key element of credible election. It is to be recalled that the PSC, at its 713th session in August 2017, 'urged member states to make deliberate efforts towards ensuring and promoting participation in democratic process'.

In relation to the elections that happened in third quarter of the year (covers Sao Tome and Principe, Zambia, and Morocco), of particular interest to the Council is the general elections in Zambia held last month where power has been transferred peacefully to an opposition leader after incumbent Edgar Lungu conceded defeat. The successful transfer of power is a

testament to the effective electoral support provided by the AU, which deployed election observation mission to Zambia led by former President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma.

The PSC may also wish to discuss those elections scheduled to take place during the fourth quarter of the year, particularly in Somalia, The Gambia, and Libya. The power tussle between the Prime Minister and the President in Somalia not only risks escalation into an open conflict but also threatened to derail the Presidential election slated for next month. In Libya, uncertainties are looming on whether the conduct of the parliamentary and presidential elections is feasible within the agreed timeline of 24 December as some of the contested issues (such as the types of elections to hold in December, a referendum on a draft constitution and qualifications to stand as candidate) remains yet unresolved. Given its history of engagement in supporting the transition in Somalia, The Gambia and Libya and the high stakes involved, it is a high time for the AU to utilize all the available tools to keep the electoral process on track.

With respect to the practice and methodology of election observation, AU has deployed short-term election observation and technical missions to all countries that organized elections during the reporting period except for Cape Verde and Algeria (on account of logistical reasons). As highlighted in the Chairperson's report, in case of Ethiopia, AU deployed a long-term election observation mission in addition to short-term AU Election Observation Missions (AUEOMs). While positive measures have been taken to make AU observation missions more effective and efficient, one important issue worth following up for the PSC is its decision, at its 713th meeting (2017), for the establishment of monitoring and follow-up mechanisms for the implementation of the recommendations of the observation missions. The other issue is on the progress in terms of building synergies with regional mechanisms, particularly through deploying Joint High Level Political

Mission (JHLPMs) and championing joint election observation missions, as stressed by the Council during its 653rd session in 2017. The joint deployment of JHLPM in The Gambia and Ghana, as well as AU and ECOWAS co-leading pre-election mission in Niger in 2020 are some of previous experiences for the Commission to build on in this regard.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. It is expected that the PSC would congratulate those member states who successfully conducted their elections during the reporting period. The Council may welcome the growing positive trend of peaceful transfers of power in some member states, notably in Niger and Zambia. However, the Council is also likely to express concerns over persisting challenges of elections including tense political climate, insecurity, opposition boycott, and low voter turnout. In this respect, the Council may encourage member states to take all the necessary steps to create conducive conditions for conducting credible, peaceful and democratic elections. On AU election observation mission, the Council is likely to echo the communique of its 713th meeting in stressing the importance for member states to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of AUEOM.

The Council may also encourage the Commission to build more synergies with regional mechanisms on election related matters, particularly through the deployment of JHLPMs as well as joint election observation missions. In relation to the upcoming elections in Somalia, the Gambia and Libya, the Council may request the Commission to use all the available tools at its disposal to support the election process in these countries, particularly through the deployment of strategic technical support to the electoral management bodies (EMBs) as well as preventive diplomacy and mediation interventions. As elections continue to be conducted within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council may reiterate its call for member states to 'expedite the adoption, and there after the implementation of AU Guidelines on Elections in Africa in the

Context of COVID-19 pandemic and other Public Health Emergencies' with the view to ensuring safety and security of people.