

Consideration of the renewal of UNAMID mandate

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Tomorrow (13 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold a session to consider the renewal of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)

mandate. Jeremiah Nyamane Kingsley Mamabolo the Joint Special Representative and Head of the UNAMID is expected to brief the Council. The session anticipates the participation of the representatives of the African members of the UNSC (A3). On account of its suspension, Sudan will not have its representative making a statement.

The drawdown of the uniformed personnel, in line with the timetable to reduce the military component from 5,470 to 4,050 personnel and the deployment of a maximum 2500 police force, by 30 June 2019 has been underway as indicated in the latest Secretary General report. However the political turmoil in Sudan has started renewed violence in Central Darfur. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have occupied most of the sites that have been evacuated by the UNAMID troops. The closed UNAMID bases were supposed to be handed over to the government to use for civilian purposes. In May Sudan's current governing body – the Transitional Military Council (TMC) – has released a decree demanding that the remaining UNAMID bases be handed over directly to the RSF.

Since the decree, the UN has halted plans to evacuate additional personnel given that the basic agreement of using sites for civilian purposes has not been respected by the current Sudanese authority. The seizure of the sites by the RSF has a great risk of exposing civilians currently protected by UNAMID in Jebel Marra area. This is the same force that has

been implicated in the killings committed since 3 June in Khartoum.

As per the planned gradual drawdown, the PSC and UNSC were expected to deliberate on the eventual closure of the peacekeeping troop by June 2020 and its liquidation to be completed by 2020. This process however depends on the security situation on the ground. It is to be recalled that the PSC during its 778 session in June 2018 when renewing the mandate of UNAMID, it has qualified the basis in which the drawdown should take place. The communiqué clearly underlined that the Council should consider key factors mainly '[e]nsuring a gradual drawdown that would allow the Mission's exit to be guided by the political and security situation on the ground so as not to create a security vacuum and expose civilian populations'.

The volatile political and security situation in Darfur and broadly in Sudan has dramatically changed in the past few weeks, which has posed a number of challenges for the continuation of the current plan for the drawdown of the peacekeeping mission. The Jebel Marra area was already susceptible to violence where the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) faction has increased over the past few months.

The protests and the ensuing instability have also disrupted the Darfur peace process, as armed groups namely the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and the Gibril Ibrahim faction of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM/Gibril) withdrew their December 2018 agreement to resume talks with the Government. The protest that has started due to the rising cost of fuel and other commodities has expanded to also include demands for sweeping political reforms. The economic crisis, the rising prices of food and medicines have also particularly affected vulnerable communities in Darfur.

The Joint Special Representative when briefing the UNSC in April 2019 stated that the political situation in Sudan has changed significantly and has the potential to affect the implementation of its mandate going forward. However Sudan's representative emphasized the domestic nature of events unfolding in the country since December, hence there is no justification for the Council to discuss the matter. During the briefing the US highlighted the need for upcoming strategic review of UNAMID to take into account the impact of recent events on Darfur, including the Government's ability to protect and provide for the region's people. Moreover, the representative stated that in a situation where the Government is unable to provide protection, the US is in favour of the Council considering all options.

After this last briefing to the UNSC, the political and security situation has deteriorated. The excessive use of force that was used to disband the sit-in camps near the headquarters of the army. Following these developments Sudan has also been suspended from the AU. Following the diplomatic efforts of

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on 7 June, the TMC arrested leading opposition leaders after their meeting with Ahmed. In June the UNSC will also hold a session on the UNAMID mandate renewal. This PSC session is expected to be informed by its previous decisions on Sudan given that the on going instability will continue to have direct impact on the situation in Darfur and the troop drawdown. Hence, the session will be key to set the tone ahead of the UNSC session in late June on the question of the kind of adjustment, if any, that needs to be made in the implementation of the drawdown.

The outcome of the session will be a communiqué. This will present the PSC to reconsider the ongoing implementation of drawdown and reconfiguration of UNAMID in light of the recent developments. The PSC is expected to renew the mandate of

UNAMID for another twelve month. Another issue for PSC decision is the adjustment of the process of withdrawal until the situation not only in Darfur but also in the country improves. In this respect, the PSC may, among others, consider slowing down of the drawdown while tasking a joint AU and UN review of the situation in Sudan and its implications on UNAMID. The PSC may also pronounce itself on the issue of the handing over of UNAMID facilities to the RSF, which will be contrary to the plan for using the facilities for civilian purposes.