

Consideration of the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on Continental Efforts in Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa

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Tomorrow (22 October) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1040th session at a ministerial level to consider the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on continental efforts in prevention and combating of terrorism in Africa.

The session is expected to have two segments, an open and a closed session. In the open session invited guests will deliver their statements. Following the opening statement by Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mozambique and PSC Chair for October, the Chairperson of the AUC Moussa Faki Mahamat is expected to deliver remarks. The Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is scheduled to deliver a presentation. Ramtane Lamamra Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Algeria and Champion in Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa is also expected to deliver remarks. The Chairpersons of the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) as well as the representatives of the European Union and the United Nations are expected to present their statements. During the closed segment Bankole Adeoye will present the report of the Chairperson of the AUC on

continental efforts in the prevention and combating of terrorism in Africa. The Secretary General of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) is also scheduled to present its statement.

The report of the chairperson is in line with the Assembly decision (/AU/Dec.311 (XV)) during its 15th Ordinary Session, held in July 2010, which requested the Commission to submit regular reports on the status of the fight and cooperation against terrorism in Africa. During its 249th meeting held in November 2010, it is to be recalled that the Council also requested the AU Commission to submit reports and briefings on the state of terrorism in Africa and the efforts made at continental and international level to address the scourge. Since then the Chairperson of the Commission has been reporting to the Council regularly, on the challenges related to terrorism in Africa and on continental efforts being undertaken towards combating the problem. The Council thus far held three of its sessions on the theme at the level of Heads of State and Government (455th, 571st, and 749th meetings). This makes the thematic issue the most addressed at a summit level.

On the state of terrorism and trends, the report underscores persistence of Africa's vulnerability to the threats of terrorism and violent extremisms despite the progress achieved by member states in preventing and combating the scourge. Citing African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) data, the report provides that, from 1 January to 30 June 2021, the continent witnessed a total of 950 terrorist attacks resulting in 3,883 deaths—showing a 10 percent increase in the number of attacks as compared to the same period in 2020. Civilians continued to bear the brunt of terrorist attacks. On a positive note, the report indicates that counter terrorism operations neutralized 1,943 terrorists. Recently, major successes have been also registered in neutralizing top ranks of terrorist groups

operating in Africa though its implication in reducing their lethality remains to be seen.

In terms of geographic distribution of terrorist attacks, the report highlights that Central Africa registered the highest number of attacks with 595 attacks resulting in 1,758 deaths (constituting 45 percent of the total death registered in the continent) while North Africa recorded the least both in number of attacks and deaths (11 attacks and 32 deaths). West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa come second, third and fourth, respectively. Mai-Mai groups, Allied Democratic Front (ADF), Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and Al-Sunnah Wa Jummah (ASWJ) were the most active terrorist groups during the reporting period. Among these, ADF that operates in eastern DRC is the deadliest while Boko Haram remains the most lethal terrorist group in Africa.

The report attributes the spread of terrorism in Africa to several factors. First is the surge in the influx of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from outside the continent. Despite the military defeat of ISIL and its affiliates in Iraq and Syria, its spillover effect has continued to reverberate across Africa and elsewhere. On one hand, the return and relocation of FTFs pose a huge security risk by enhancing the operational capability of local terrorist groups and affiliates, particularly in the area of using and manufacturing Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). On the other hand, the threat posed by ISIL and Al-Qaida has morphed into a 'less visible network of autonomous individuals and cells', which makes efforts of combating terrorism more challenging. Growing trend has been also witnessed among terrorist groups operating in Africa in terms of pledging allegiance to ISIS and Al-Qaida though there is little evidence suggesting strong link between them. It is against this context that the PSC, during its last session on FTFs (957th meeting), requested the AU Commission, African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) and ACRST to

‘develop a comprehensive “guideline framework for countering FTFs”, as well as to expedite the development of a “database” of persons, entities or organizations involved in or supporting, in any form, the activities of terrorist organizations...’.

The second factor is the intricate linkage between terrorism and trans-national organized crime where not only illicit economies have become major source of financing for terrorists but also its profitability has become financial motivation for them to continue with their activities. Hence, as noted by the report of the Chairperson, depriving terrorist and violent extremist groups of their sources of funding should be a central element of any counter terrorism strategy. Terrorist groups also derive their funding from kidnapping-for-ransom (KFR), which showed a dramatic rise in 2021 as compared to the same period last year. Proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the rise of mercenarism—phenomenon particularly aggravated by the instability in Libya and Sahel—are also mentioned as factors contributing to the spread of terrorism in the continent. It is also worth noting that terrorists have taken advantage of the porous nature of African borders and ungoverned spaces in some of African countries due to weak national institutional capacities in this regard.

On the continental efforts to address the scourge, AU has made strides in building strategic partnership with UN and other stakeholders including through the launch of Coordination Committee between the AU Commission and UN Office of Counter-Terrorism on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. The AU has also continued its support to RECs/RMs and member states to strengthening their capacity in countering terrorism through the available mechanisms notably ACSRT, AFRIPOL, and CISSA. The ACSRT, for instance, have been providing assistance in the areas of developing/reviewing their respective counterterrorism strategies and plan of actions, building technical capacities, as well as sharing

information and analysis. AFRIPOL, on its part, is also working to assist member states in their efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and transnational organized crimes through training and technical expertise. The establishment of the African Police Communication System (AFSECOM), which is intended to facilitate easy and security communication and sharing of information and data among police agencies of member states is a positive step towards the operationalization of AFRIPOL. The establishment and functioning of the 55 AFRIPOL National Liaison Offices (NLOs) within member states is another notable development having an impact on the functioning of AFRIPOL as well as its linkage with police agencies of member states. Financial, human and infrastructural issues however remain huge challenges in effectively discharging their mandates.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. Among others, the Council is expected to express its concern over the surge in influx of FTFs into Africa and its implication on the peace and security of the continent, and in this regard, the Council may reiterate its warning to 'name and shame' all those involved in sponsoring FTFs. In addition, the Council may recall its 1035th session that emphasized the need to expedite the implementation of the establishment of an African list of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts, including FTFs. Towards strengthening continental mechanisms to counter terrorism, the Council may follow up on its previous decisions as well as the decision of the 14th extraordinary session of the Assembly on Silencing the Guns including the development of a comprehensive strategy for countering terrorism in Africa; the urgent need to operationalize AU Special Fund on the prevention and combating of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa; the establishment of special unit on counter-terrorism within the ASF; and the reactivation of the Council's sub-committee on counter-terrorism. The PSC may also stress the need to strengthen the capacity of the specialized agencies including

CISSA, ACSRT and AFRIPOL to fulfill their mandates effectively and to enhance their horizontal cooperation to create more synergy. The Council may reiterate its previous decision on the need to address the root causes including poverty and marginalization, which provide breeding ground to terrorism. Drawing on the recommendation of the report of the Chairperson, the Council may also highlight the need to mainstream counterterrorism and prevention/countering of violent extremism in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).