

# Consideration of the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on Countering Terrorism in Africa and Related Issues

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Tomorrow (27 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) convene its 1182<sup>nd</sup> session at ambassadorial level to consider the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on counter terrorism.

Following the opening statement by **Daniel Owassa**, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Congo and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of October, the Commissioner of the Political Affairs, Peace and Security, **Bankole Adeoye**, is expected to deliver remarks. Additionally, **Lallali Idriss Lakhdar**, Acting Director of the Africa Centre for the Research and Study on Terrorism, is expected to give a presentation.

The report of the Chairperson aligns with the decision made by the Assembly ([/AU/Dec.311 \(XV\)](#)) during its 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session in July 2010. The Assembly requested the Commission to provide regular reports on the progress of counterterrorism efforts and cooperation in Africa. Furthermore, the PSC, in its [249<sup>th</sup> session](#) in November 2010, urged the AU Commission to submit reports and briefings on the state of terrorism in Africa, as well as the efforts of the AU, Regional Economic

Communities/Mechanisms and member States to combat this issue. It is worth noting that the Malabo Summit on Terrorism, held in May 2022, marked the fourth occasion where the issue of terrorism was discussed at the level of Heads of State and Government. This is not surprising considering that conflicts involving terrorist groups continues to grow from strength to strength.

As pointed out in our various research outputs including our landmark [special research report](#), Africa has experienced major spike in not only the proliferation of conflicts involving terrorist groups but also in their impact and geographic spread. According to the [African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism](#) (ACSRT), Africa witnessed a staggering 400% increase in attacks and a 237% rise in deaths between 2012 and 2020. The [2023 Global Terrorism Index](#) (GTI) further reveals that despite a slight decrease in terror attacks from 1,445 in 2021 to 1,332 in 2022, there was an 8% surge in deaths in 2022, making Africa the region with the highest increase in terrorism-related fatalities. Additionally, the ACSRT's [quarterly terrorism bulletin](#)) reported a 12% increase in terrorism attacks during the first quarter (January – March) of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022 with 426 recorded attacks and 2,809 deaths. The ACSRT report indicates that the attacks 226 targeted civilians and 160 targeted military forces.

The report also highlights the alarming geographical spread of terrorism, particularly in the Sahel and the West African coastal states, making the Sahel region the epicentre of terrorism in the world. As indicated in the 2023 GTI report, 'four out of the ten most impacted countries by terrorism in 2022 were located in the Sahel region'. While Burkina Faso had the highest number of deaths in 2022, the areas near its borders with Niger, Benin, and Mali witnessed the majority of terror attacks, 'accounting for 71% of all attacks that occurred in 2022'. The border area known as Liptako-Gourma,

located between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, continues to be the most severely affected region.

Additionally, there is also encroachment of terrorism into coastal West African states from the Sahel affecting Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Ghana.

For instance, in Togo, a violent terrorist attack was carried out on 11 May, 2023 by around 60 attackers at a military outpost in Kpinkankandi, near the border with Burkina Faso. It was [reported](#) that this attack resulted in the death of eight Togolese soldiers and left 13 others injured. The GTI report further indicates that 17 attacks and 44 deaths occurred in Benin and Togo in 2022. In Ghana, the government [expressed](#) concern that an escalation of violence could benefit jihadist groups after 'criminals' attempted to bomb a bridge in Bawku, a northern region of Ghana bordering Burkina Faso on 9 February 2023.

Similarly, Boko Haram and its faction the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) have also expanded their activities to Southern Nigeria and neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. The groups' actions have resulted in the displacement of millions of people and a humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad region. In East Africa, al-Shabaab's operations along the Kenya-Somalia border have been reported to have significantly [increased](#) starting from June this year. Recently, on 10 September Kenyan Defence Forces' Soldiers patrolling along Milimani-Baure Road were killed and injured during a suspected al-Shabaab [attack](#) in Lamu County's Boni Forest.

When it comes to Central Africa, there has been a significant rise in the overall number of attacks due to the activities of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in the Great Lakes Region. In the South, the ACSTR recorded 31 attacks by Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ), the terrorist group operating in Mozambique.

The other issues that the Chairperson's report may also highlight is the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and those returning after joining the ISIS in places such as Syria.

Given the rise in the frequency and geographical spread of terrorism, it has become clear that the overreliance on hard security response measures is not delivering the expected outcomes. If anything, it has exacerbated the situation through its adverse impacts including abuses and collateral damages it inflicts on affected communities. This necessitates that the policy response achieves a shift towards enhancing and focusing on the use of non-security measures targeting the governance, institutional, socio-economic, environmental and development issues that create the conditions for the emergence and expansion of conflicts involving terrorist groups.

It would also be of interest in PSC's consideration of the Chairperson's report to discuss the impact of the constitutional crisis ensuing from military coups particularly in the Sahel on efforts for containing the growing threat of terrorism in the region. The Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), a subregional arrangement initially composed of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, is gradually losing its strength as a result of member states' withdrawal. In May 2022, Mali [decided](#) to withdraw from the G5 Sahel, including the FC-G5S, due to disagreements among the regional group members regarding the transitional authorities in Mali assuming the rotating presidency of the organization. This withdrawal has caused a profound institutional crisis within the subregional organization, as stated by Eric Tiaré, the Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel, in his [address](#) to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Since then, coup d'états have taken place in Burkina Faso and Niger, leading to an alliance between the de facto leaders of Mali and Niger as well as the interim president of Burkina Faso.

On the other side, another development worthy of interest to this session is the [signing](#) of a charter that established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) on 16 September. In his press statement, Abdoulaye Diop, Mali's Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasized that the main focus of the alliance '...is the fight against terrorism in the three countries.'

As in the past, one other issue that has increasingly received attention in the Chairperson's recent reports is the relationship between terrorism and transnational organized criminal networks. Among the terrorist groups operating in West Africa, the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) are [known](#) for taking advantage of such networks including for financing their activities and the recruitment of new members. In areas with predominantly informal economies, limited state resources and presence, and pervasive corruption, terrorist groups find it easy to levying taxes with little opposition from locals. This is particularly observed in territories experiencing the insurgence of JNIM and ISWAP.

The consideration of the Chairperson's report is also expected to also deliberate on how terrorist groups operating in Africa are increasingly leveraging advanced technologies to mobilize support, recruit and carry out their attacks. Organizations such as al-Shabaab and ISWAP have adapted to the digital era by utilizing a variety of tools and platforms to plan, communicate, and organize their operations. Some terrorist groups, for example in relation to the Lake Chad Basin region, Boko haram, have sought to use drone technology for surveillance and weapon delivery. The ISWAP for instance has [increased](#) its use of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED). Attention should also be paid to the risk of such actors employing cyber warfare tactics to disrupt crucial infrastructure and communication networks. Additionally, it is important to address the significant reliance of these groups

on small arms and light weapons.

Tomorrow's session would also serve as an opportunity for reviewing the efforts made by the AU, its Member States, and RECs/RMs to contain the spread of and enhance concerted efforts in the face of the transnational and transregional character of the threat. As it did last time, the Chairperson's report further emphasizes that the predominant responses have been of a military nature, and ongoing attacks have resulted in increased militarization of states' reactions. However, it is crucial to devote more attention to comprehending the less evident covert activities, such as the collaboration between terrorists, violent extremists, and illicit actors in recruiting and mobilizing resources. In this respect, the report calls for renewed efforts and provides a list of preventive measures.

The expected outcome is a **communiqué**. The PSC is expected to express its concern over the continuing scourge of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as the surge in the influx of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) into Africa and its implications for the peace and security of the continent. Towards strengthening continental mechanisms to counter terrorism, the PSC may recall Decisions, particularly [Assembly/AU/Dec.753.XXXIII] of February 2020, and Assembly/AU/Dec.815(XXXV) of February 2022, on the establishment of a Counter-Terrorism Unit within the African Standby Force (ASF). The PSC may also request member states to enhance the implementation of applicable AU instruments and Decisions, specifically the 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and the 50th OAU/AU Anniversary Solemn Declaration. Furthermore, the PSC is expected to stress the need for efforts to combat transnational organized crime, especially the proliferation of illicit arms, including through enhanced intelligence sharing mechanisms, border management cooperation, and control. The PSC may also reiterate its previous decision on the need to address the

root causes of terrorism, including poverty and marginalization, the weak or absence of presence of the state and legitimate local governance infrastructures, which create the conditions for a breeding ground for terrorism. The PSC is also expected to emphasize the need for increased support for those affected by armed conflict, including children, youth, and women impacted by terrorism, radicalization, and insurgency. Additionally, the PSC may recognize the need to collaborate with Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) and AU Organs to build community resilience and promote long-term recovery through post-conflict reconstruction and development programs. 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).