

# Consideration of the Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Elections in Africa

Consideration of the Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Elections in Africa Date | 02 August 2022

Tomorrow (02 August), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1096<sup>th</sup> session to consider the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on elections in Africa conducted during the first half of 2022.

Following opening remarks of the Permanent Representative of The Gambia to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Jainaba Jagne, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to make a statement and introduce the report.

The Chairperson's report on elections in Africa is regularly submitted to the PSC in line with the Council's request made at its 424<sup>th</sup> session to receive quarterly briefings on national elections conducted in the continent. In recent years, the report is presented twice a year. Following the report of the Chairperson on elections conducted during the second half of 2021 (July to December 2021), which was considered by the PSC at its 1062<sup>nd</sup> session convened on 31 January 2022, tomorrow's briefing is expected to provide updates on elections conducted from January to June 2022 as well as preview of those expected to take place during the second half of 2022.

In the first half of 2022, a major milestone achieved in the conduct of elections in Africa was the finalisation of

Somalia's much delayed parliamentary and presidential elections on 15 May. It is to be recalled that Somalia's general elections were originally agreed to commence in December 2020 but was not honoured as the then incumbent President sought to extend his term of office plunging the country into a constitutional and political turmoil. On 14 April 2022, senators and members of the parliament were sworn in and on 15 May, they voted for the president and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected as the new president of Somalia, bringing to conclusion the protracted electoral process. The peaceful handover of power from outgoing President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo to the elected incoming President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was not only a great achievement for Somalia, but also an exemplary record of democratic practice for the Horn of Africa region where such a tradition is in short supply. Despite its successful completion, the election was unfortunately marred by procedural irregularities and incidents of violence which resulted in multiple civilian casualties. Moreover, the election modality of "one-person-one-vote" incorporated in the provisional constitution could not be implemented in the election of the members of the House of the People. The 30% quota for women in parliament agreed in the September 2020 Electoral Agreement could also not be met with women constituting only 21% of elected members of the parliament. This is a notable decrease from the 24% achieved in the 2016 election, suggesting a concerning regression in efforts aimed at increasing women's meaningful engagement and participation in politics.

The election of members of the National Assembly of The Gambia was another one of the elections that was anticipated to take place in the first half of 2022. In December 2021, Gambia successfully completed its first Presidential election since the defeat of former President Yahya Jammeh in 2016. As a test for democratic transition, the completion of the presidential election, preceded by political wrangling among various political parties and on the record of the incumbent, was an

important milestone for the country. The National Assembly election was conducted against the backdrop of the presidential election and was successfully concluded on 09 April 2022. According to the statement issued by the AU Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to Gambia on its preliminary findings, the election was conducted under a peaceful atmosphere and in an orderly manner, a standard that is becoming common in describing elections in Africa but qualitatively lower than the standards of 'free, fair and credible'. A shortcoming noted by the AUEOM was the delay experienced in legal reforms to address gaps in the legal framework for elections, including promotion of women and youth participation through affirmative action. Indeed, the lack of such reforms has contributed to the very low participation of women – out of the 246 candidates nominated to occupy seats in the National Assembly, only 19 were women.

Mali was also among the member States anticipated in the previous report of the AU Commission Chairperson, to conduct general elections during the first half of 2022. In line with the 2020 Transition Charter of Mali, the country was set to conduct general elections on 27 February 2022, putting an end to the transition period. As highlighted in the Chairperson's previous report, the new political dynamics, following the May 2021 coup, made the 2022 elections timeline infeasible. Based on the recommendations made at the "*National Refoundation Conference*", Mali's transition authorities decided to extend the transition period for over three years of additional period, provoking imposition of sanctions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). After continuous diplomatic efforts and engagements between Mali's transition leaders and ECOWAS Mediator for Mali, Goodluck Jonathan, Mali adopted a new transition timetable on 01 July which adjusts the duration of the transition to be 24 months, starting from 29 March 2022. At its 61<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Session which took place on 3 July 2022, ECOWAS lifted the economic and financial sanctions it imposed against Mali, having regard to the new

transition calendar. It did however maintain Mali's suspension from all ECOWAS decision-making bodies as well as individual sanctions imposed against specific groups and personalities.

During the second half of 2022, three key AU member States are expected to conduct elections – Angola, Kenya and Senegal. Angola is set to have its presidential and legislative elections on 24 August, with reports indicating registration of over 14 million voters expected to head to the polls. President João Lourenço, who will again be running for president, and his party, People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), will be confronting a newly formed opposition coalition, the United Patriotic Front which is led by Costa Junior of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

Kenya's general elections are scheduled to take place on 09 August. While the incumbent president Uhuru Kenyatta is standing down after his two terms in office and setting a good example against third-termism for the rest of the continent, the contest between Deputy President William Ruto and opposition leader Raila Odinga – now backed by current President Kenyatta – is already creating much tension. Given the country's recent history of highly contested polls and election violence, the forthcoming elections will be among those that will require close monitoring by relevant actors including the AU. In that spirit, the AU, along with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC), has already deployed a joint high-level pre-election assessment mission to Kenya from 14 to 21 May 2022. Following the invitation by the Kenyan Government, the AU will also be deploying an international election expert mission to observe the general elections.

Following the local elections which took place on 27 January, Senegal's parliamentary elections were just concluded successfully on 31 July, paving the way for the 2024 presidential election. In the local elections, the

presidential party conceded defeat in the capital city, Dakar as well as the southern city of Ziguinchor and confronted tougher competition at the parliamentary elections with the key opposition coalition parties having forged a deal to unite and join forces ahead of the elections. Reportedly, about 7 million voters participated in the parliamentary elections to elect 165 representatives in the National Assembly. A short-term EOM was also deployed by the AU to observe the elections and the findings of the mission are expected to feature in the report of the AU Commission Chairperson for the upcoming reporting period (second half of 2022).

The peaceful as well as credible and transparent conduct of the elections in these three countries will be critical in consolidating electoral processes and advancing democracy in the continent.

Further to the three member States, Libya and Chad are also among those States with 2022 set as their timeline for conducting elections. Libya's general elections postponed from December 2021 still remain indefinitely postponed despite some proposals having been made with recommended timelines within 2022. The political crisis involving the contestation between the interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh and Fathi Bashagha, appointed Prime Minister by the east-based House of Representatives, punctuated by armed confrontations, continues to undermine progress. It seems most unlikely for the country to hold the elections in 2022. Chad is also expected to conduct national elections in September. However, having regard to the slow transition process, including the delays experienced in setting the date for national dialogue – finally announced to commence on 20 August – which is expected to serve as a precursor for the elections, there is a high likelihood for the transition timeline to be extended.

In addition to reflecting on elections in these and other relevant member States, the Chairperson's report is also expected to highlight some of the key trends observed in the

continent's electoral and political governance. In that regard, tomorrow's session is expected to pay attention to the democratic backslide recently experienced due to unconstitutional changes of government in multiple member States and the unique challenges of conducting elections in the context of countries in transition. Election related violence, electoral malpractice, and high political tensions could also be some of the concerning trends that may be highlighted.

The expected outcome of the session is a Communiqué. Council may congratulate those member States that peacefully finalised their elections during the reporting period and encourage their fortified efforts towards ensuring democratic governance in their respective countries and the continent at large. It may also note the conclusion of the protracted elections in Somalia and welcome the peaceful transfer of power from the incumbent to the newly elected President, setting an example for the Horn of Africa region. 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. It may also urge political parties and independent election candidates to make full use of all available legal channels to settle any election disputes that may arise and to refrain from any recourse to election-related violence and to this end urge national electoral bodies and dispute settlement mechanisms to ensure that they abide by and uphold the highest standards to safeguard the integrity of electoral processes and afford all parties reliable and trustworthy avenues for dispute settlement. Council may further commend the AU Commission for the support provided to member States which conducted elections during the reporting period and encourage its further engagement and provision of support to those member States currently preparing to organise elections during the next reporting period.