

Consideration of the Status Report on the implementation of the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework

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Tomorrow (01 March), African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1142nd session to consider a status report on the implementation of the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework: Country Structural Vulnerability Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS).

The Permanent Representative of Tanzania to the AU and Chair of the PSC for the month of March, Innocent Shiyo, will deliver opening remarks while the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to provide a status update on the implementation of the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework.

One of the side events at the recently concluded 36th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly was a High-Level meeting on 'early warning within the framework of the African Union Peace and Security Council and the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services in Africa (CISSA)', which was hosted by President Teodoro Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. In that side event, the representative of Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari called on Member States to 'embrace' the CSCPF and its tools, the CSVRA/CSVMS, as part of the efforts to strengthen continental early warning system. The tools were devised with the hope to address structural causes of conflicts and achieve

sustainable peace in the continent, but the political buy-in so far remains far from satisfactory as evident from the fact only three African countries were part of this process since the launch of the CSCPF.

Tomorrow's session is an opportunity for the PSC to take stock of the implementation of the CSCPF and its tools -CSVRA/CSVMS – and provide strategic guidance on how to revitalize the process for effective conflict prevention, which is one of the main objectives of the PSC.

The CSVRA/CSVMS came within the framework of continental early warning system and as a follow-up to PSC's 360th session, held in March 2013, a session that stressed the need for a strategic focus on addressing the structural/root causes of conflicts. During its 463rd session that took place in October 2014, PSC commended the Commission for its efforts to finalize the elaboration of the CSCPF as well as to develop a Structural Vulnerability Assessment tool and further requested the Commission to expedite the process. PSC's 502nd session, convened in April 2015, adopted the CSVRA/CSVMS tools, and requested the Commission, in collaboration with the RECs, to avail all the necessary assistance to Member States and popularize the tools while encouraging Member States to fully take advantage of these tools in their efforts towards the structural prevention of conflict.

Recently, the Assembly, during its 35th ordinary session, held in February 2022, encouraged Member States to 'utilize the opportunities afforded by the Commission and RECs/RMs to address structural causes of violent conflict through the implementation of the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment/Country Structural Vulnerability and Mitigation Strategies (CSVRA/CSVMS) processes.' In that summit, the Assembly went on requesting the Commission to establish a 'Monitoring and Oversight Committee' comprising

the AU Commission, RECs/RMs, APRM and Member States to facilitate effective coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In tomorrow's session, PSC may follow-up on progress made towards the implementation of this decision.

As highlighted in the 502nd session of the PSC, the CSCPF has been developed to facilitate a Commission-wide and coordinated approach to structural conflict prevention with the aim to identify and address structural weaknesses that have the potential to cause violent conflicts if left unaddressed. In operationalizing the CSCPF, the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD) of the Peace and Security Department developed the CSVRA/CSVMS tools with the former designed to facilitate the identification of a country's structural vulnerability to conflict at an early stage while the later to focus on strategic and medium to long-term measures aimed at mitigating the country's structural vulnerabilities and build resilience.

The CSVRA/CSVMS are voluntary processes and hence should be implemented by Member States through a request simultaneously addressed to the AU Commission and the concerned REC. The request may come at the initiation of the AU. Following the request, a team of experts composed of an expert nominated by the Member States, the CEWS staff, representatives of relevant AUC departments, representative from the concerned REC, as well as representatives from other stakeholders will be formed to work on CSVRA report, which is envisaged to be finalized within three months. Once the report is finalized, the next phase will be for the concerned state, in coordination with the AUC and the relevant REC, to start working on the CSVMS in coordination between the Member State.

Indeed, the status of implementation of the CSVRA/CSVMS leaves a lot to be desired, highlighting the need for revitalizing these important tools. In that context, there are at least three points that the PSC may consider in tomorrow's

deliberation.

First, as a voluntary process, the ideals of CSVRA/CSVMS cannot be achieved without securing greater political buy-in of Member States. The fact that only three Member States have acceded to the process thus far clearly tells not only the low buy-in but also the Commission's limitation to effectively sell these tools and the benefits they avail to Member States. It is recalled that Ghana was the first to initiate the structural vulnerability assessment in 2017, followed by Cote d'Ivoire and Zambia in 2019 and 2020, respectively. It is encouraging that few other countries – such as Seychelles, Madagascar, and Mauritius – have reportedly shown interest to engage in the process, but additional effort is required on the side of the Commission to bring more countries on board. This may also require addressing concerns about the framing of the exercise as vulnerability assessment. Additionally, structurally there is a need for aligning this exercise with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) whose review also involves such structural vulnerability analysis of countries under review.

Second, despite the rhetoric, conflict prevention and early warning system in general and the CSVRA/CSVMS tools in particular have received little attention as much of the focus seems on activities related to conflict management. This has been for instance reflected in the new PAPS structure, which, unlike the previous structure, does not have a dedicated division to conflict prevention and early warning. There is in particular a need for the member states to provide resources for the AU Commission in order for it to have a dedicated capacity, which, working with the APRM, promotes the full and active operationalization of these tools.

Third, there is a high need to clarify the relation with other AU tools particularly the APRM. The PSC should provide policy guidance on how these two mechanisms complement each other so that there is no confusion on their respective purposes and

objectives.

The expected outcome is a communique. PSC may underline the critical importance of CSVRA/CSVMS tools to the structural prevention of conflict and consolidation of peace and stability in the continent. Considering the benefits that the CSVRA/CSVMS tools offer particularly in identifying and addressing the structural vulnerabilities of member states that may evolve into violent conflicts, the PSC is expected to encourage Member States to fully take advantage of these tools. It may also request the Commission to provide all the required support to Member States. It may further request the Commission to develop strategy to better popularize these tools and ensure greater buy-in of Member States so that more countries undertake the assessment. PSC may also request the Commission to enhance its working relationship with the RECs/RMs in the implementation of the CSVRA/CSVMS, as well as to better clarify the relationship between these tools and the APRM. In the light of the fact that the institutional reform had left the CSCPF without a structure for its effective operationalization, the PSC may call for a dedicated capacity within PAPS for taking responsibility in promoting and implementing CSVRA/CSVMS.