

Debate on climate change, peace and security in Africa

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Tomorrow (21 April), African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1079th session to deliberate on climate change, peace and security in Africa.

Tomorrow's session is expected to proceed in open and closed segments. In the open segment of the session, following an opening remark by Willy Nyamitwe, Permanent Representative of Burundi and the Chairperson of the PSC for April, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to make statement. AU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, Josepha Sacko, is envisaged to deliver presentation. Egypt, in its capacity as the host of the 27th session of Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27), and the United Nations are also expected to make statements.

Climate change and security is one of PSC's standing thematic agenda items that has been regularly discussed particularly since its decision, during 585th session in March 2016, to dedicate an annual open session on the theme. Since then, the Council dedicated around 10 sessions including the last one at its 1051st meeting convened on 26 November 2021. Tomorrow's session is therefore in line with Council's decision to hold an annual session on climate change and security.

In 2021, PSC convened three sessions on climate change and natural disaster, two of them held at summit level. The PSC has adopted several communique that clearly acknowledged the climate-security nexus and highlight the different pathways in

which climate change, peace and security interact. For instance, at its 774th session that took place on 21 May 2018, Council underscored the linkage between climate change and peace and security in Africa. Furthermore, a communique adopted at the 1051st session also recognized the risks of climate change, as 'threat multiplier', to the African peace and security landscape as it is leading to greater food and water insecurity, loss of livelihoods, depletion of natural resources, and more climate-linked human displacements.

Although it is hardly possible to establish a direct causal link between climate change and violent conflicts, the potential impact of climate change in aggravating existing vulnerabilities, tensions and conflicts, thereby triggering inter-communal violence has been highlighted by the PSC. It is also in this context that climate change is described as 'threat multiplier'. The Concept Note prepared for the session further notes the possible impact of climate change in increasing the frequency and intensity of conflict and human security issues in the continent, leading to 'protracted and multifaceted humanitarian and security crisis'. The fact that seven of the ten countries that are most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa tells the relevance of the theme to the continent.

Tomorrow's session may also reflect on how rapid urbanization dynamics and demographic change that the continent is witnessing are adding additional layer to the impact of climate change on Africa's peace and security landscape. Despite a general understanding and consensus within the Council on the security implication of climate change in Africa, the issue of how exactly climate change intersect with peace and security, the causal link between climate change and security, and how climate-related security risks could be integrated within the existing African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) need to be further explored.

In terms of AU's intervention to respond to climate change, it is to be recalled that Council, at its 585th session held in March 2016, stressed the imperative of mainstreaming climate change in all AU activities, particularly in early warning and conflict prevention efforts. The recent launch of the Africa Multi-hazard Early Warning and Early Action System (AMHEWAS) in the AU Commission is a step forward in improving continental early warning capacity on disaster risks for early action. The development of AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan to guide, coordinate and support the continent's response to climate change for the period 2022-2032 is another positive step taken by the Union. Sacko's presentation may also touch on AU's efforts to support the work and operationalization of the three Climate Commissions which were set up in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2016, namely the African Islands Climate Commission, Congo Basin Climate Commission, and Sahel Climate Commission. The issue of building synergy and maintaining closer coordination and cooperation between the AU Commission and the three climate Commissions remain extremely important.

As the next round of climate talks, COP27, is around the corner which is slated to take place in November 2022 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, this session could also serve as a platform to converse on areas of priorities that should be put forward by the continent and how to factor in the climate-security nexus in the discussions. In the recent meeting of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) held on 6 February, the current coordinator of the Committee, Kenya's President, Uhuru Kenyatta, outlined 'Climate Finance', 'loss and damage', 'Global Goal on Adaptation', 'Keeping 1.5 degrees C alive', and 'recognition of the Special needs and circumstances for Africa' as Africa's priorities in the upcoming COP27 and highlighted the need to focus on mobilizing support towards these priority areas. The Assembly during its 35th Ordinary session held in February this

year also highlighted different priorities that are expected to shape Africa's negotiating points at COP27.

Tomorrow's session also presents members of the Council the opportunity to follow up on the implementation of the different initiatives and decisions agreed in previous sessions with the aim to take the agenda forward. The first of such decision which becomes particularly important in light of the upcoming COP27 is the need for developing a Common African Position on Climate Change. This was decided by the Council at its 984th session held at a summit level. The 1051st session reiterated its call for the development of the Common Position on climate change, and in particular on climate finance and operationalization of the Global Goal on Adaptation.

The second decision worth following up is the finalization of a study on climate-security nexus. As highlighted before, it was at its 774th session that Council mandated the Commission to undertake the study. In its last session on the theme, it is to be recalled that Council requested the Commission to 'expedite the finalization of a climate-related security risk assessment study... to define the varying security impacts of climate change on the African continent...'

The third is on the appointment of an AU Special Envoy for Climate Change and Security pursuant to Council's decision at its 774th session. During the 984th session, Council asked the Chairperson of the Commission for a feedback on the status of progress regarding the appointment of the Special Envoy who will work closely with CAHOSSC. Moreover, the PSC may follow up on the establishment of AU Special Fund for Climate Change which the Council agreed to establish at its 984th session convened under the chairship of Kenya.

Africa's leadership on climate change and security has also been visible in the UNSC. It is to be recalled that Niger during its presidency of the UNSC in December 2021, tabled the

first draft resolution on climate change and security jointly with Ireland. The draft resolution was not adopted after Russia vetoed it. However, it is to be recalled that the UN Security Council recognized the link between climate change and violence in its region specific agenda items including in the context of West African and the Sahel through a Presidential Statement adopted on 30 January 2018.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. Council is expected to once again recognize the negative and disproportionate impact of climate change on the peace and stability as well as socio-economic development of the continent despite its low contribution to global warming. Council may welcome the establishment of the Africa Multi-hazard Early Warning and Early Action System (AMHEWAS) Situation Room for disaster risk reduction. In terms of enhancing AU's capacity to provide effective support for Member States as well as Regional Economic Communities in addressing climate related risks, as pointed out in the Concept Note prepared for the session, PSC may consider the possibility of increasing the staffing and elevating the Climate Change Unit to a Climate Change Division. In relation to the issue of enhancing coordination and cooperation with the three Climate Change Commissions, Council may consider joint sessions with the Commissions. On the climate change-security nexus study it mandated in May 2018, Council may wish to set a timeline for the finalization and submission of the study for its consideration. Similarly, it may also request the Commission to expedite the appointment of a Special Envoy on climate security, which is expected to enhance the advocacy efforts and African leadership on the issue. On the upcoming COP27, Council is likely to underscore the importance of maintaining the unity of Africa and speaking in one voice in the climate change negotiations at COP27 including through strengthening support provided to the African Group of Negotiators on Climate Change (AGN).