

# Emergency session on the situation in Gabon

Emergency session on the situation in Gabon Date | 31 August 2023

Today (31 August) at 3 pm East African Time, the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to convene an emergency meeting on the coup in Gabon.

On 30 August military officers appearing on national television announced the ouster of the government of the incumbent President Ali Bongo. The coup was announced soon after the announcement of the results of the general elections that Gabon held on 26 August. In the early hours of 30 August, the Gabonese Election Centre (CGE) announced the results of the presidential elections, declaring that the incumbent Ali Bongo the winner of the Presidential Election with 64.27 % of the votes cast.

The processes leading up to the announcement of the results were clouded with uncertainties, disputations and concerns about the transparency and credibility of the elections. While the leader of the opposition coalition Albert Ondo Ossa claimed victory in the elections, in the days ahead of the announcement of the election the opposition camp reported that the election was a 'fraud orchestrated by Ali Bongo and his supporters'. This allegation came after the imposition of a curfew and the shutting down of the internet in the country by the government, thereby raising concerns that these measures were taken to create conditions for tampering with the election results.

The elections were indeed held under circumstances that cast doubt on the possibility of ensuring the credibility and transparency of the elections in a manner that reflects the

will of the electorate. Election observers, including AU observers, were not welcomed. Some media outlets were suspended. The government also cut internet service and imposed a night-time curfew nationwide after the poll.

It is against this background that the military officers announced the seizure of power. Explaining their action, the senior military officers, self-styled as the 'Committee of the Transition and the Restoration of Institutions, who seized power said that '[i]n the name of the Gabonese people ... we have decided to defend the peace by putting an end to the current regime.'

Some members of the government were also arrested including the son of the president, Nouredine Bongo Valentin, the chief advisor of the president and his deputy, two other presidential advisors and two top officials of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG). The military also put the ousted president under house arrest. Following the coup, the internet was restored. Yet, the coup makers maintained the nightly curfew imposed in place.

On the same day, the coup makers named General Brice Oligui Ngueme as the leader of the transition. General Ngueme, as head of the President's Republican Guard, is not someone who is an outsider but very much internal to the regime. This signifies that while the coup removed the leader, the regime remains intact and in power.

As with other recent situations in countries that experienced coups, the ouster of Bongo was also greeted with celebrations from people. While the coup ushers in the end of a government that was in power for decades and opens a possibility for change, it does not provide a politically legitimate avenue for addressing the irregularities associated with the elections. In this respect, it would be of interest for the PSC to address the disputed elections including the convening of inclusive consultations with the opposition presidential

candidates and the political parties for developing a roadmap for the convening of free and fair elections.

The AU Commission Chairperson issued a statement on the same day. Indicating that the chairperson was following the situation with great concern, the statement expressed his strong condemnation of 'the attempted coup d'état'. He also encouraged 'all political, civil and military actors in Gabon to give priority to peaceful political avenues and a rapid return to democratic constitutional order in the country.' Similarly, the Secretary-General of the UN also firmly condemned 'the ongoing coup attempt' and expressed his 'strong opposition to military coups.'

The PSC will make a determination on the application of Article 30 of the Constitutive Act within the framework of Article 7(1)(g) of the PSC Protocol. In light of the electoral crisis that preceded the coup, one of the issues for the PSC is how to facilitate a process that leads to not only the convening of free and credible elections, but also the building of fully functioning constitutional rule in Gabon.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The PSC may welcome the statement of the Chairperson of the Commission and express its condemnation of the coup pursuant to the AU norms banning coups including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG). The PSC may also decide to suspend Gabon from participation in the AU activities in accordance with Article 30 of the Constitutive Act and ACDEG. The PSC may express its concern about the recurrence of the holding of elections of questionable legitimacy and credibility and the need for African States to ensure that they create the space and mechanisms for ensuring that elections are held in accordance with the parameters set in ACDEG. With specific reference to the situation in Gabon, the PSC may call for the convening of consultation with the opposition political parties and presidential candidates to agree on a roadmap for the transition and the convening of

free and fair elections. The PSC may also call for the removal of the military from politics and the establishment of an inclusive civilian transitional authority. It may also request in this respect that an AU high-level facilitator be designated with the responsibility of facilitating dedicated engagement for ensuring an inclusive civilian transition. The PSC may finally call for respect to ACDEG and respect for the rights of citizens including leaders and members of the opposition.