

Inauguration of 'Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation'

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Tomorrow (31 January), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1135th session for the inaugural commemoration of the 'Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation' in line with the Declaration of the 16th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU. The open session is expected to take place in a hybrid format where AU Member States and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) attend the meeting in-person while other participants join remotely.

The Permanent Representative of Uganda and Stand-in Chairperson of the PSC for January, Rebecca Amuge Otengo, will deliver opening remarks to the session which is expected to proceed in two segments. During the open segment of the session, AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat is expected to make the lead statement while President of Angola and AU Champion for Peace and Reconciliation in Africa, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, is scheduled to provide the inaugural keynote statement for the launch of the Africa Day of peace and reconciliation. Representatives of four Member States, namely The Gambia, Burundi, Rwanda, and South Africa, are expected to share the experience of their respective countries on how they pursued the reconciliation processes. In addition, Chairperson of the AU Panel of the Wise and former President of Burundi, Domitien Ndayizeye, and Co-Chair of *FemWise-Africa* and *former President of the Central African Republic*, Catherine Samba-Panza, are anticipated to deliver statements while presentations on the Peace Dividends from National Reconciliation, Dialogue and Social Cohesion could be

made by an African female/Child affected by armed conflict.

This session is convened in accordance with the declaration of the 16th Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly on terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government in Africa held last May in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, which decided to institute **31 January** of each year as the 'Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation'. In that Summit, the Assembly further appointed Angola's President, João Manuel Gonçalves LOURENÇO, as AU Champion for peace and Reconciliation in Africa. It is to be recalled that the 22nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly [Assembly/AU/Dec.501(XXII)] of February 2022 declared 2014-2024 as the 'Madiba Nelson Mandela Decade of Reconciliation in Africa'. On the other hand, the PSC, at its 525th session held in July 2015, agreed to make the theme 'Peace, Reconciliation and Justice' a standing item on its indicative annual programme of activities. On 5 December 2019, during its 899th session, PSC also agreed to dedicate an annual session aimed at experience sharing and lessons learning on national reconciliation, restoration of peace and rebuilding of cohesion in Africa.

The PSC has dedicated several stand-alone sessions since 2013 to discuss the theme of peace and reconciliation. For instance, during its 383rd session, held in June 2013 at the ministerial level, PSC highlighted the critical role of national reconciliation to achieve lasting peace by overcoming divisions arising from conflict and restoring social cohesion. It was also at this ministerial session that the PSC first proposed the idea of developing an AU Framework on national reconciliation and justice, but that initiative seem to have fallen through the cracks.

PSC's 525th session of July 2015 urged Member States to 'show greater sense of responsibility and strong commitment to national reconciliation processes' as part of the efforts to

achieve a peaceful, integrated, and prosperous continent. The 672nd session, convened in March 2016, drew attention on the need to invest in institutions and reconciliation processes while embarking on post-conflict reconstruction. The 899th session of December 2019, convened at the initiation of Angola, then Chairperson of the PSC, took several decisions to step-up efforts in the promotion of national reconciliation in the continent, including the decision to dedicate annual session on experience sharing on national reconciliation, and develop an implementation and monitoring mechanism to take forward the various aspects of national reconciliation in post-conflict situations. Most recently in August 2022, PSC also convened lessons learning session broadly on the implementation of AU Transitional Justice Policy, though not specific to the issue of reconciliation.

The commemoration of Africa Day will complement and builds on these existing AU efforts that are aimed at raising awareness about and mobilize support for reconciliation as a vital tool to achieve lasting peace in the continent.

The continent has rich experience of national reconciliations that offer good lessons to Member States that are pursuing or intend to pursue reconciliation. As such, part of tomorrow's program will be lessons learnt and experience sharing by three of PSC Member States (The Gambia, Burundi, South Africa), as well as Rwanda.

In the world of transitional justice, the experience that received world-wide recognition for making truth and reconciliation commissions globally popular is South Africa. The reconciliation process has successfully transformed South Africa from an Apartheid system to a constitutional democracy, but there is a growing call for addressing the socio-economic dimensions of South Africa's past that continues to impede the structural transformation of the society and the dismantling of pervasive inequalities affecting the historically oppressed

majority of South Africans.

In the case of The Gambia, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) which was established in December 2017 with the mandate to investigate and establish an impartial historical record of human rights violations from July 1994 to January 2017, has received international prominence for its achievements in uplifting the political consciousness of the public and the high level of public interest it evoked in giving a hearing for victims and the public an opportunity for acknowledging the violations. It is to be recalled that the TRRC delivered its final report documenting violations and abuses of human rights and the government issued a white paper in May 2022 accepting almost all the TRRC's 265 recommendations. The next critical step for The Gambia, therefore, remains the full implementation of the recommendations outlined in the TRRC report.

Burundi also pursued the reconciliation process by creating a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which is born out of the Arusha Agreement of 2000 for peace and reconciliation in Burundi, in 2014 and extended for four years in 2018. The Commission has made some progress in conducting investigations and identifying mass graves as well as exhuming victims. At the same time, the composition, mandate, and activities of the Commission has been subject of controversy as critics raise question about the impartiality of the Commission in interrogating acts of violence involving all conflict actors, not excluding members of the ruling party.

Rwanda's experience on the other hand reveals the use of traditional mechanisms, the community based *Gacaca* courts, as a home-grown solution to achieve the twin goals of retribution and reconciliation. The *Gacaca* courts are lauded for its role in filling in for the formal court system that were decimated during the genocide and played instrumental role towards achieving unity and reconciliation. Reintegration of genocide convicts, unresolved cases of compensation to genocide

survivors, persistence of genocide ideology and denials remain challenges for Rwanda.

Beyond exchanging best practices from these experiences to identify lessons learned, this day can also be instrumental for reflecting on existing conflicts and peace processes on the continent. Indeed, this first anniversary of the Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation comes at a time when Africa is in very dire security situation. The number of conflicts has spiked in recent years. Apart from conflicts that take the form of civil wars, many countries in various parts of the continent also suffer from conflicts involving terrorist violence. The factors for the emergence and continuation of many of these conflicts involve political, socio-cultural, and developmental governance deficits exacerbated by a winner takes all approach to political power and repressive and authoritarian exercise of government power and violent response to opposition and dissent.

Indeed, the litmus test of the material contribution or value of this day as well as that of the AU flagship project of Silencing the Guns lies in how this day helps to put a spotlight on and mobilizes targeted intervention for the mitigation, if not resolution of existing conflicts from the Great Lakes Region, where the armed conflict involving armed rebel groups such as the M23 and Allied Democratic Forces is raging with the mounting tension between Rwanda and DRC reaching yet another high point last week, to the Sahel where conflicts involving terrorist violence continues to expand unabated and to the Horn of Africa battered by existing and new wars and violence. In this regard, the day may serve as an occasion for mobilising and reaffirming support for, among others, the Luanda and Nairobi processes on the conflict in Eastern DRC while calling for maximum restraint by DRC & Rwanda, the full implementation of the Pretoria peace agreement between Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the accompanying Nairobi

Declaration, the peace process in Libya, implementation of the peace agreement in South Sudan within the newly extended timetable and the negotiations towards civilian led transitional process in Sudan being facilitated by the Trilateral Mechanism.

The expected outcome of the session is not clear at the time of finalizing this insight. However, the outcome document is expected to welcome the inaugural commemoration of the Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation. It may highlight the important role of national reconciliation towards achieving AU's noble goal of Silencing the Guns by 2030 considering the critical role that reconciliation plays in preventing conflict relapse and laying strong foundation for sustainable peace in countries emerging from violent conflicts. In that regard, PSC may urge the Commission and other stakeholders to pay due attention to the reconciliation component while brokering peace between parties to a conflict. PSC may also reiterate those key elements of credible reconciliation process as outlined in the 383rd session and may further emphasize the importance of ensuring the participation of key stakeholders such as women and youth in the process. The PSC may also call on conflict parties to implement cessation of hostilities as good will for the Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation and opportunity for resolving the conflict through mediation and negotiation. The PSC may also urge those involved in peace processes (in Eastern DRC, Libya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Sudan) in various conflict settings to collaborate with and actively engage in the processes and take the necessary measures for implementation of commitments they made for resolving conflicts and active reconciliation.