

Informal Consultation between the PSC and CPAPS on Early Warning

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Tomorrow (9 July), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold an informal consultation with the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS) on early warning.

Miguel Cesar Domingos Bembe, Permanent Representative of Angola to the AU and PSC Chairperson for July, will make an opening remark during the informal consultation. The CPAPS, Adeoye, is expected to brief the PSC.

The last time the PSC held an ordinary session on early warning was at its [1208th](#) session convened on 16 April 2024, discussing ways to unblock obstacles and ensure effective early warning and response. During the session, the PSC not only expressed its commitment to fully implement Article 12 of the PSC Protocol on the establishment and operationalisation of AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) but also tasked the AU Commission (AUC) to take specific measures to enhance early warning and early response. The Commission is also required to report back to the PSC before the end of the year. One such measure highlighted in the communiqué is to 'hasten the ongoing AUC institutional reforms to enhance the utility of the CEWS in PSC decision-making processes as one of the pillars of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).' Furthermore, it is recalled that the PSC, during its [Mombasa retreat](#), held in May 2021, agreed to hold monthly early warning meetings with CPAPS and use such platforms to share particularly 'sensitive' early warning information.

While tomorrow's informal consultation aligns with the Mombasa retreat, the main focus is likely to be on CPAPS providing the PSC with an update on the actions taken as a follow-up to PSC's 1208th session and sharing proposals for enhancing early warning drawing on analysis received from technical experts tasked by PAPS.

As the PSC reflected on its 20-year journey last month, one of the major limitations identified in the implementation of the PSC Protocol is its conflict prevention mandate broadly, and Article 12 of the Protocol that establishes CEWS specifically. The Dar es Salaam [Declaration](#), adopted on 25 May 2024 at the High-Level Colloquium in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the PSC, commits to enhancing the PSC's conflict prevention mandate, including by responding swiftly to early warning signs of looming conflicts and crises and fully utilising all available preventive diplomacy tools, such as the Panel of the Wise, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FEMWISE), AU's Pan-African Network of the Wise (PANWISE), and YouthWISE. The Declaration further emphasises the need for the Commission to elaborate a clear and objective criterion on a trigger mechanism to facilitate the role of the PSC in assessing the need for early action while ensuring its consistent application in all circumstances.

In a [special research report](#) we released in May to complement the policy debates on the lessons from the two-decade journey of the PSC, the PSC's conflict prevention mandate is identified as one of the key aspects of the PSC Protocol where implementation has fallen short and requires further attention. According to the report, despite the PSC Protocol's emphasis on conflict prevention, the PSC has predominantly functioned like a 'fire brigade,' primarily responding to conflicts after they erupt. This tendency, the report argues, has resulted in the proactive dimension of its mandate, especially conflict prevention, being largely ignored.

As noted in our previous analysis, including [‘Insights on the PSC’](#) and the special research report indicated above, there are several factors that account for this poor state of implementation of early warning and early action dimension of the (APSA). These factors can be categorised into institutional, technical, and political spheres.

Institutionally speaking, the major factor is the AU Commission’s limited focus on conflict prevention as reflected in the institutional reform that restructured the Peace and Security department into the new Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS). Unlike its predecessor, the new PAPS lacks a dedicated division for conflict prevention and early warning, marking a significant institutional regression in the conflict prevention mandate. With the CEWS structure removed, early warning and governance monitoring are ‘mainstreamed’ into the regional desks, thereby depriving CEWS of a dedicated structure housing and responsible for it. The ‘Situation Room’ now serves PAPS in its entirety rather than being part of the conflict prevention directorate. This restructuring not only fails to conform with Article 12 of the PSC Protocol but also has created operational difficulties, as CEWS is deprived of a fully dedicated structure for its regular functioning.

The technical aspect of the challenge to the use of early warning for conflict prevention concerns the development of methodologically sound, substantively rigorous and solid early warning reports. Related to this is the process not only for the collection of quality data but also for an informed analysis and interpretation of the early warning data. The call for the establishment of a ‘trigger mechanism and indicators’—a request first made during the [Cairo Retreat](#) held in October 2018—to facilitate the role of the PSC in assessing whether a given situation calls an early action by the PSC remains unheeded. The other challenge that traverses the technical and political domains is the lack of effective flow of information between the early warning mechanism and those

responsible for initiating early response, the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the PSC. The analysis and reports generated by the early warning system fail to effectively reach decision-makers or prompt timely action. For example, although the 'horizon-scanning briefings' were intended to facilitate the exchange of 'sensitive' early warning information between the Commission and the PSC, as envisaged in the Mombasa retreat, these briefings seldom delve into such sensitive matters.

On the political front, the major hurdle, as alluded to by the PSC in various of its sessions including the 1208th session as well as the May 2024 High-Level Colloquium, is the 'culture of denialism' by Member States and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) regarding credible early warning reports of looming crisis and conflict situations, while invoking sovereignty as a shield. This denial prevents timely action, including the deployment of preventive diplomacy and mediation. At times, Member States are backed by RECs/RMs, claiming the principle of subsidiarity, to block a looming situation/crisis from reaching the agenda of the PSC.

The PSC has explored several options to address these challenges. It is thus critical to ensure the implementation of the relevant parts of the conclusions of the Cairo and Mombasa retreats of the PSC. The 1208th session also outlined several measures, including expediting the ongoing AUC institutional reforms; utilising the Panel of the Wise and AU Inter-Regional Knowledge Exchange on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention (I-RECKE); leveraging technological advancements; ensuring the timely dissemination of daily, weekly and monthly early warning reports to Member States; and monitoring, tracking and ensuring the implementation of previous decisions of the PSC on continental early warning and security outlook.

The next and critical phase in the effective deployment of early warning is ensuring the reinstatement of the CEWS as envisaged in the PSC Protocol. Indeed, critical to compliance with the PSC Protocol as envisaged in Article 12 is housing the CEWS in a dedicated structure within PAPS, hence reversing the mistake of dismantling the structure where CEWS was housed during the institutional reform that led to the emergence of the current PAPS Department. It is also critical to develop and implement a protocol for sharing early warning on country-specific developments with the AU Commission Chairperson and the PSC.

Not any less important is ensuring the timely crafting and activation of early action. As outlined in our special research report cited above, there can be no effective conflict prevention where early warning is not accompanied by and does not trigger follow-up preventive action. Article 9 enjoins the PSC to 'take initiatives and action it deems appropriate with regard to situations of potential conflict'. It is thus incumbent on the PSC to determine whether to pursue such 'initiatives and action' through a) collective intervention of the Council as a whole, b) its Chairperson, c) the Chairperson of the AU Commission, d) the Panel of the Wise, and e) in collaboration with a regional mechanism. It is thus clear that the collective intervention of the PSC—whether through a) having a matter on the agenda of the PSC, b) considering such matter in an informal consultation, or c) undertaking a field mission—is only one of the range of options available for preventive action.

No formal outcome document is expected from tomorrow's consultation. However, concrete recommendations on enhancing the continental early warning system are anticipated to emerge from the consultation. The PSC may provide direction on the next steps to translate the recommendations, as well as previous decisions on the issue, into action. Member states may request full implementation of Article 12 of the PSC

Protocol, which requires ensuring the reinstatement of the CEWS structure in the PAPS department as envisaged in the PSC Protocol. PSC may also reiterate its request from the 1208th session for the Commission to report to the PSC before the end of this year on the implementation of the specific measures outlined in the communiqué, with a view to unblocking obstacles and ensuring effective early warning and response.