

Briefing on conflict prevention, early warning and mediation in Africa

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Tomorrow (13 December) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to receive a briefing on conflict prevention, early warning and mediation in Africa. Fred Ngoga, Head of the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD) of the AU Commission is expected to brief the PSC. Representatives of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) may also make interventions.

The briefing is expected to focus on two main issues. The first will be horizon scanning of threats to peace and security in Africa. A second possible aspect of the briefing may be an update on the status of development of conflict prevention tools.

One of the key principles that guide the operationalization of the PSC mandate is 'early response to contain crisis situations to prevent them from developing into full-blown conflicts.' The PSC Protocol highlights the Council's responsibility to 'anticipate and prevent conflicts' particularly through 'early warning and preventive diplomacy'. Conflict prevention and early warning is also one of the key objectives of the AU articulated in the Constitutive Act.

However, during the last briefing on early warning, at its 669th session the PSC has indicated its concern with regards to the 'continued cases of denials to objective/credible early warning signals of looming crises, thereby undermining the conflict prevention capacity of

Council’.

Similarly at its 12th retreat held in June 2019 in Rabat, the PSC stressed challenges to conflict prevention including insufficient funding and resources, lack of political will of member states and sensitiveness around the categorization of looming crisis. Towards enhancing the capacity of the Council it has ‘decided to increase the regularity of briefing sessions with the AU Commission, on issues relating to looming crises with a view to assembling the relevant information for appropriate action’. Tomorrow’s session will also be an opportunity to deliberate on some of these challenges that are preventing the scaling up of early warning mechanisms for early action.

Within this context, the horizon scanning is expected to assess the security situation in the five regions and may identify the major threats witnessed across the continent. It may particularly look into the broad areas of root causes, structural factors and drivers of conflict including terrorism and radicalization, climate change, election, democratization, governance, respect of human rights and the rule of law as well socio-economic inequalities and marginalization.

As part of its Border Program, CPEWD’s presentation may also highlight the tension that may be arising from border demarcation and delimitation disputes.

In terms of country and regional focus, it may pay particular attention to situations which are experiencing not only looming crisis but also countries and regions that may be experiencing relative stability while confronted with risks of relapse to violence. In this regard, the briefing may shed light on the developments in various countries, which are currently in political transition or have recently signed peace agreements or are in mediation processes including countries such as Sudan,

South Sudan and CAR. It may also pay particular attention to close to twenty countries that will be holding elections in the coming year.

The briefing may also look into the cross-border and regional aspect of conflict prevention. It may offer an analysis on regions that are experiencing conflicts and crisis emanating from intertwined and compounded factors affecting multiple countries. The presentation may also provide an assessment of key trends and analysis on changing dynamics and complexities surrounding the causes of conflicts.

In the light of the longstanding challenges of effective operationalization of the conflict prevention mandate of the PSC, it would be of interest for PSC members to look into the modalities for a more effective engagement in conflict prevention. In this regard, consideration can be given to Article 8(11) of the PSC Protocol that provides for the possibility of the PSC holding informal consultations. As a meeting format that has not been adequately explored, informal consultation particularly at the level of Committee of Experts of the PSC avails useful avenue for considering early warning briefings and exploring options for preventive action.

After the overall overview of peace and security risks and threats, the presentation in its second part may look into conflict prevention tools and update on their progress. This will also be an opportunity to promote and enhance the utilization of continental and regional mechanisms by policy makers.

Article 2 of the PSC protocol stipulates the need for the Council to be supported by the various mechanisms including Continental Early Warning System in fulfilling its mandate. CEWS primarily consists of two components: (i) the continental observation and monitoring center, known as "The Situation Room" and (ii) the observation and

monitoring units of the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RMs), which collect and process data and are linked directly to the Situation Room. To this end, it will be critical to deliberate on mechanism that enhance the synergy and close collaboration between the AU and RECs/RMs in providing up-to-date and relevant information to the PSC as well for the PSC itself to strengthen its working relations with the regional entities.

Considering the ongoing AU institutional reform process and increased PSC engagement with RECs/RMs, Council members may wish to recall the commitments made during PSC's 12th retreat which tasked the PSC jointly with RECs/RMs policy organs to establish 'criteria for assessing looming crises and emerging situations... to ensure ... common understanding of parameters, benchmarks and principles that define entry points for interventions'.

The presentation by the division may also provide an update on the activities of Panel of the Wise as a key pillar that is established for preventive diplomacy and in order to support the efforts of the PSC and those of the AUC Chairperson, particularly in the area of conflict prevention. The briefing may provide an update on the recently concluded annual statutory meeting of the Panel of the Wise as well as the AU Special Envoy Representatives. PSC members may also follow up further on the work of the Special Envoys considering the decision at its 12th retreat 'to hold each year a PSC session during which AU Special Representatives/Envoys and AU High Representatives will provide briefings'.

The presentation may also provide an update on thematic issues related to Gender, Peace and Security Program and the work of FemWise as well as their harmonization with other gender centered mechanisms in the Commission including the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security and the Gender Directorate.

As part of the Youth for Peace program activities the presentation may also raise the developments around the 'Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa', which was recently considered by the PSC.

The expected outcome of the session was unknown during the production of this 'Insight'. The PSC may urge member states to strengthen their efforts at the national level as well as support the efficiency of early warning and prevention mechanisms at AU and RECs/RM level. Towards operationalizing its mandate, the PSC may also urge for the strengthening of the reporting tool of the Commission through enhancing of the systematic provision of early warning reports. The PSC may also urge the Commission to provide regular briefings and horizon scanning to equip members with relevant data for effective decision-making. To this end, the PSC may consider adopting informal consultation as the format for a more regular and systematic consideration of early warning and conflict prevention sessions including through the convening of such informal consultations at the level of Committee of Experts.