

# Briefing on Elections in Africa

Automatic Heading TextDate | 04 December, 2018

Tomorrow (4 December 2018) the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) will hold a briefing session on elections in Africa. It is expected that the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Minata Samate Cessouma, will present a briefing to the PSC. The Department of Peace and Security (PSD) is also expected to make a statement.

As highlighted in the program of the month, this is a quarterly briefing. While the practice of providing briefings on elections in Africa can be traced back to the Report of the Panel of the Wise entitled 'Election-related disputes and political violence' and the 392nd meeting of the PSC, it was at its 424th meeting that the PSC decided to have a briefing from the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) on elections in Africa on a quarterly basis.

The last time the PSC held this session was at its 747th meeting held on 18 January 2018.

Tomorrow's briefing is expected to offer a review of the elections held on the continent between January and November 2018. The elections expected to receive attention within this context include those held in Cameroon, eSwatini, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Rwanda, Soa Tome and Principe and Zimbabwe. Of particular interest would be the trend that the briefing is expected to highlight in terms of not only good practice and challenges observed in conducting elections but also in terms of the monitoring of elections. This may include reference to 'any cases of election malpractices and shortcomings' that the communiqué of the 747th meeting of the PSC required AU Electoral Observation Mission reports to

highlight for future lessons.

While some of these elections continue to reflect continuing challenges relating to credibility of elections and confidence of parties in electoral bodies, others such as Madagascar show the importance of regional and continental engagement for addressing disputes relating to the electoral process. In terms of positive developments, the peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent party to a previously opposition party through election witnessed in Sierra Leone is expected to be highlighted as being exemplary. In countries with conflicts such as Mali and Cameroon, a major issue of interest is the implication of conflicts on electoral processes.

In terms of the role of this briefing session to provide early warning on election related disputes, the upcoming elections that the briefing is expected to highlight would in particular be crucial. In this respect, the run-off presidential election in Madagascar is expected to be a major test in terms of peaceful transition of power for a country that remains under the shadow of the political crisis resulting from the 2009 unconstitutional change of government. It is to be recalled that the PSC held a session on the situation in Madagascar on 18 November. With the major actors of the 2009 crisis Marc Ravalomanana and Andry Rajoelina, facing off in the run-off election, the bitter rivalry between the two have made the stakes in the run-off election higher than the first round of elections.

Another election that will receive the attention of the PSC is the presidential election expected to take place in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The issues relating to the election planned to take place on 23 December, including its timely convening as per the electoral calendar of 5 November 2017, have been subject of deliberation at the 808th session of the PSC held on 19 November. From the perspective of tomorrow's briefing, what is of interest is an update from the DPA on the request of the PSC's communiqué from its 808th

session for the AU Commission (AUC) 'to take all necessary measures for to dispatch an electoral observation mission, commensurate with the issues at stake in these elections.'

In terms of the elections expected to take place in the first quarter of 2019, the briefing is expected to cover the general elections in Nigeria, the presidential elections in Senegal and legislative elections in Benin. In respect of these elections, it would be of interest for PSC members to know about how the AUC plans to engage not only in terms of deployment of election assessment and observation missions but also in terms of identifying risks of electoral tensions.

From a perspective of the practice and methodology of election observation, it would be of interest for the PSC to get update on developments relating to the need that various PSC outcome documents including the communiqué of its 747th session indicated in terms of enhancing the African Union Election Observation methodology, reporting and coordination mechanisms with other relevant international missions. This includes the coordination with electoral observation missions of regional bodies.

The outcome of the session is expected to address the various issues arising from the briefing. It would, among others, highlight the continuing importance of elections in the democratization process of the continent, the need for improving the quality of elections including through ensuring the independent functioning of electoral management bodies and even playing field, and the importance of resolving existing crisis and conflicts as necessary condition for inclusive and credible elections. Enhancing the role of this briefing to map electoral risks for providing early warning to the PSC highlighting the measures that the AU could take for mitigating the risks through joint work of DPA and PSD would be of particular importance for the work of the PSC. To this end, the outcome could highlight the importance of holding the quarterly briefing timeously.