

PSC Briefing on the Harmonization of the ACIRC within the ASF Framework

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Tomorrow (19 September) the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) will hold a briefing on the harmonization of the African Capacity for Rapid Intervention in Crises (ACRIC) within the African Standby Force (ASF) framework. Convened on the request of Nigeria, the meeting will examine the conceptual, structural and institutional harmonization of the ASF and ACIRC. The session will also evaluate the progress made by the two mechanisms since the last briefing to the PSC. The meeting will receive a briefing from the Peace and Security Department (PSD)'s Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD).

The meeting is held in line with the decision 695 of the AU Assembly meeting in Nouakchott, which requested quarterly progress update on implementation of decision 679 of the 30th ordinary session of the Assembly.

The meeting will also receive updates from the Secretariat of ACRIC in PSOD on the state of the ACIRC, its relations with the ASF mechanism and recent developments in the implementation of the Maputo Strategic Work Plan on the Enhancement of the ASF (2016-2020). The five-year work plan for the ASF highlighted the changing security environment and threats on the continent. Its recommendation for dynamism into the design and structure of the ASF to respond to the challenges goes in line with the initiative to harmonize the ASF with the ACIRC. The session will use the indicators,

deliverables and timelines defined by the five-year work plan as a reference to evaluate the move towards harmonization of ACRIC with ASF, particularly its rapid deployment capability (RDC). The training, exercises, airlift and mission support capabilities of the regional forces and their progress in articulating the command structure and control, and logistical capabilities of the ASF and ACIRC will also be discussed by the session.

The discussion and debate of the meeting will focus on the complex relationship between the ASF and ACRIC. Divisions still exist among the member states of the AU and within the AU Commission on the relevance, role, interaction and the need for keeping the two as parallel initiatives. There is an opinion that sees ACIRC as a redundancy, an admission of failure to fully operationalize the ASF, and questions the value addition of the ACIRC. This view sees the 2013 initiative as a project that diverts and distracts the attention, energy, resources and political focus of the continent and partners that should have been spent on realizing the ASF. Those participating in ACRIC consider the mechanism as providing the mechanism for rapid mobilization and more flexibility (compared to the region based and relatively more region approach of the ASF) in cases emergency situations.

Despite its success for standardization, training and mobilization of peace support mission in Africa, security challenges in the continent have revealed the weakness of the ASF in rapidly deploying troops. Harmonizing the ASF and ACIRC will primarily focus on addressing this structural gap. The conversation on the ASF and ACIRC dynamics is taking place while the continent is witnessing a sweeping trend of relying on ad-hoc regional coalitions and deployment arrangements and alliances as a rapid response mechanism. The meeting is expected to address these trend in the context of the effort for harmonization

of the ASF and ACRIC.

While peace support operations serve as a vital tool of crisis response, changing security dynamics and trans-regional nature of emerging security threats demand a more flexible, agile and effective missions. The possibility of an effective transfer of responsibility to local security forces and institutions, and withdrawal of missions with an extended presence and limited effectiveness still look distant. These conditions and reality significantly affected the reputation and effectiveness of the traditional peace support operations in Africa, and called for a revision of the existing practice and arrangements. The threat posed by transnational terrorist groups and non-state actors need a 'fit for purpose' and tailor made mandated approach, which is currently lacking in the traditional African Union and UN missions in Africa.

Tomorrow's meeting will examine the ASF-ACRIC harmonization as a response to the question of effectiveness and sustainability of peace support operations in the continent. Reviewing the design and structure of the ASF in a way that enhances its deployment capabilities and mission effectiveness including the ACIRC as its component is seen by the AU as a way forward. An important aspect of this session is also finding a balance between rapid and flexible regional initiatives and overarching standards and principles developed within the framework of the ASF.

Also important for tomorrow's session is tailor made interventions with greater emphasis on political initiatives underscoring the imperative of the primacy of political strategy over military or security approaches. These include integrating and enhancing the role of preventive diplomacy and mediation mechanisms, the African Governance Architecture (AGA), Africa's normative framework to constitutionalism and inclusive governance. Enabling national institutions is critical in the path from conflict to

sustained peace, and should be part and parcel of the ASF-ACIRC harmonization.

The expected outcome of the briefing is a communiqué. The communiqué may stipulate a timeline for finalizing the harmonization of ACRIC within the ASF and for all efforts at the levels of the AU and regions to focus on the full operationalization of the ASF with necessary adjustments for flexible, rapid and effective utilization of ASF in response to emerging crisis.