

Briefing on Silencing the Guns in Africa

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Tomorrow (10 December) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will consider the draft report on the implementation of the AU Roadmap on Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, which will be presented to the next ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa in February next year.

Silencing the Guns is a flagship initiative of the African Union to promote prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. It provides the overarching strategy guiding the efforts of the organization in ensuring a peaceful and secure Africa and laying a solid foundation for the implementation of Agenda 2063. As part of the Solemn Declaration of the 50th Anniversary of the African Union, African states committed “to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa, to make peace a reality for all our people and to rid the continent of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters and violent conflicts and to prevent genocide.” They further pledged “not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans and undertake to end all wars by 2020.”

The AUPSC submitted a Master Roadmap of practical steps to Silencing the Guns by 2020, which was endorsed by the Assembly in January 2017. In view of the impending deadline, the upcoming AU Summit in February next year is expected to take stock of the progress made and the challenges encountered in the efforts made towards achieving the objective of silencing the guns in Africa. In this context, the 32nd ordinary session of the Assembly requested the PSC, with the support of the

Commission, to take steps for the elaboration of a comprehensive report on the status of implementation of the AU Master Roadmap.

Therefore, the AUPSC will consider the draft report before its submission to the Assembly. A decision has already been made that the AU theme of the year for 2020 would be "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development".

For PSC member states, some of the issues of interest include the degree of progress made and the remaining challenges as well as the measures to be taken for addressing the challenges towards increased progress for silencing the guns in Africa. Although fragile, some progress has been made towards resolving some of the most intractable conflicts in Africa. The signing of the revitalized peace agreement in South Sudan had revived hope for restoring peace. The guns have by and large been silent but without implementing the letter and spirit of the agreement, there is a serious risk of reversal. Ensuring accelerated progress in the extended pre-transition period of 100 days will be very critical in this regard. The signing of the peace agreement in Central African Republic also rescued the country from falling into the abyss but challenges still abound. Furthermore, the signing of the power-sharing deal by the Sudanese stakeholders with the support of the AU and Ethiopia has set a very good example in the search for African solutions to African problems.

The normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea also ended long standing stalemate that impeded stability in the Horn of Africa. However, without resolving some of the outstanding issues, sustaining the peace will be a challenge. Progress has also been made in recent years in strengthening governance including in holding peaceful elections in Africa. This said, strengthening institutions of governance, promoting inclusive politics, responding to the needs and aspiration of the people remains a daunting challenge.

By AU's own admission, some of the limited progresses achieved thus far are a far cry compared to the lofty goals and objectives set out in the AU Master Roadmap for silencing the guns in Africa and the scale of remaining challenges. The continent no doubt continues to face serious threats to its peace and stability. Parts of Africa remain mired in conflict and new challenges to peace and security have emerged.

Governance deficits coupled with the global economic slowdown and its attendant impact on commodity prices as well as the youth bulge and high rates of unemployment have made many African countries vulnerable to instability and conflict. Together with this, the mismanagement of diversity and competition over power and resources have also contributed to fueling conflicts in some parts of the continent. In other parts, state fragility and weak state institutions have increased the risk of those countries that have emerged out of conflict relapsing into yet another cycle of conflict and violence.

Therefore, that a lot remains to be done towards silencing the guns in Africa is all the more evident and, hence, the need to redouble efforts to fast-track implementation. There is a recognition of this fact and a dedicated Unit under the Bureau of the AU Commission Chairperson has been established.

Considering the new global geo-political dynamics, enhancing the role of the AU and regional mechanisms in the promotion and maintenance of peace and security in Africa is not an option. The institutional reforms underway will be critical in strengthening the governance and security architectures of the AU to accelerate efforts towards silencing the guns in Africa. Ensuring greater coordination and synergy between the AU and regional mechanisms is also vital. Furthermore, the revitalization of the AU Peace Fund will contribute to addressing the financing needs of the AU in its prevention and peacemaking efforts. At a time when there is donor fatigue, enhancing greater ownership of the AU's programmatic

activities and enhancing the contribution of member State to the Peace Fund has become all the more indispensable. This should be driven by the conviction that building a conflict free Africa is essentially the responsibility of the AU and its Member States, their people and their institutions, including civil society.

Although no outcome by way of statement or communique is expected, the AUPSC is expected to endorse the draft report with revisions and recommend it for adoption by the Assembly. It may express appreciation to the AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa and recommend that a plan is put in place for addressing challenges faced in the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap.

The PSC may also welcome the adoption of resolution 2457 (2019) and commend the role of Equatorial Guinea and other members of the A3 for their important contribution in facilitating its adoption. It may also reiterate the need for all AU Member States to submit their reports on their implementation of the AU Master Roadmap.