

Briefing on the Situation in Great Lakes Region

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Tomorrow (22 January), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold its 974th session to receive a briefing on the situation in the Great Lakes region. Following opening remarks by the PSC Chair of the month, Baye Moctar Diop, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal, Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security is expected to deliver introductory statement. The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission for the Great Lakes Region, Basile Ikouebe is also scheduled to make a presentation. Statements are also expected from representatives of the East African Community (EAC), International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU).

The last time the PSC convened a dedicated session on the Great Lakes region was on 10 January 2020. This session is, therefore, expected to afford PSC the opportunity to assess recent political and security developments in the region, most notably- the upsurge of armed conflicts and the national election in Central African Republic (CAR) held in December; and the persistent attacks in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the collapse of the coalition of political groups and the resulting political crisis in the DRC.

The political and security crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains to be a concern to the overall Great Lakes Region. Early in the year and over the past week, intense clashes between the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the National Army of DRC, as well as ethnically targeted attacks by rebel forces have claimed the lives of multiple civilians, particularly in the eastern provinces of the country. Police brutality, sexual violence and kidnapping for

ransom (KFR) continue unabated. The PSC is expected to consider and reflect on these concerning trends.

In DRC, the year 2020 ended with escalated political tension between the ruling coalition of President Félix Tshisekedi and Common Front for Congo (FCC) parliamentarians who stand in support of former President Joseph Kabila. Tensions sparked following President Tshisekedi's decision to dissolve the parliamentary setting and FCC's rejection of the decision as illegal. While the formation of a coalition government in 2019 somewhat allowed for power sharing between the newly elected President Tshisekedi and supporters of former President Kabila who won majority of seats in Parliament, the two sides still continue to have differences over major issues relating to constitutional court appointments; security arrangements; and electoral process. Council may also comment on these developments and call on relevant actors to deescalate tensions and work towards peacefully resolving differences.

It is also to be recalled that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) extended the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for a one-year period until 20 December 2021, in its resolution adopted on 18 December 2020 (UNSC Res2556 (2020)).

The PSC may welcome this resolution, which maintains MONUSCO's troop ceiling similar as previous year's despite the mention of a phased drawdown under UNSC Res2502 (2019). In light of the recent political instability and continuing security challenges in DRC, UNSC's decision to hold back on drawdown of troops was in line to the deteriorating security situation.

In addition to the political and security crisis, Council may also discuss the impacts of public health pandemic in the region, particularly DRC. The 11th Ebola outbreak in the DRC has been cause of concern in the overall region. As of early January 2021, reports have indicated 130 confirmed cases and

55 deaths in Équateur Province. Compounded by the rising cases of COVID-19 and fears of a second wave of the outbreak, possible deterioration of the humanitarian situation is likely to ensue, both in the DRC and the region at large.

Intensifying violence leading up to and following election in Central African Republic (CAR) on 27 December 2020 has also been among the most recent factors contributing to instability in the Great Lakes region. Opposition presidential candidates have contested the election, which was held in volatile circumstances. Despite such claims, the Constitutional Court has declared the re-election of President Touadéra on 18 January, granting him additional 5 years in office.

The violence, which unfolded following the election, has also led to mass displacement of civilians who continue to flee the situation. Over the past week alone, nearly 60,000 individuals have fled the country, most heading towards the DRC. In addition to those leaving CAR, nearly as many people are internally displaced – reportedly around 58,000 persons. In addition to the violence which erupted following 27 December's election, these displacements are also attributable to the nationwide offensive attack perpetrated by the newly formed coalition of armed groups – the so-called 'Patriots for Change' – during the month leading up to the election. In addition to displacing a total estimate of over 100,000 people, these attacks have also prevented thousands of citizens from voting. Having regard to these developments and the understandable fear of return to a full-blown war in the country, the PSC may call on all relevant parties to immediately cease violence and refrain from considering military options.

Tomorrow's session will also be an opportunity for the PSC to follow up on its 936th session decision, which authorized the deployment of the AU Military Observers Mission to the Central African Republic (MOUACA) for the period from 1 September 2020 to 31 October 2022. The PSC is yet to receive a briefing on

the operationalization of MOUACA.

The political situation in Burundi has shown considerable improvement over the past year. At its 4 December 2020 meeting, it is to be recalled that the UNSC has struck off Burundi from its political agenda having regard to the peaceful nature of the 2020 elections. The PSC may reflect on this development and its contribution to the overall peace and security situation in the Great Lakes region.

The circumstances under which the Ugandan general elections of 14 January 2021 took place may also be of interest to Council. Reports have indicated that the elections were conducted amid violence and allegations of fraud. While the incumbent President Yoweri Museveni has been declared to win re-election, the PSC may advise all relevant parties to take necessary measures as to ensure contestations of the result do not lead to post-election crisis in the country. The EAC may also brief Council on its findings in relation to the election process in Uganda.

While these political and security challenges persist, Council may also take note of some of the positive developments in the region. In particular, the notable decrease in violence in South Sudan and the efforts to repatriate South Sudanese refugees has been a great achievement witnessed in 2020, in addition to the successful formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU). Moreover, despite recent political tensions, DRC has remained relatively stable for most of 2020 in addition to showing significant improvement in its relationship with regional and international actors. The commitment shown by Member States to resolve their differences through diplomatic means and regional mechanisms can also be regarded as one of the positive developments seen. For example, the diplomatic resolution of the border dispute between DRC and Zambia as well as the commitment shown by Rwanda and Uganda to normalise their relationship through the good offices of Angola and DRC

are encouraging.

In addition to these country specific situations, the PSC may also follow up on the progress obtained in the implementation of the 2013 Peace and Security Cooperation Framework (PSCF) for the DRC and the region. The ICGLR in particular may brief Council on progress and challenges in the implementation of the PSCF, as one of the guarantors of the Framework. In addition, the PSC may receive a briefing by the UNOAU on the new strategy on 'Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region' produced by Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region, Huang Xia, on 12 October 2020. The new strategy which sets out UN action for the coming decade, has a specific focus on preventive diplomacy, security, cooperation, development, and promotion of human rights and is structured around three pillars: Peace, Security and Justice; Sustainable Development and Shared Prosperity, and Resilience to Former and New Challenges.

The expected outcome of the session is unknown at the time of production of this insight. The PSC may however include in its outcome document a call for countries of the region as well as relevant Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to increase their cooperation and coordination towards achieving sustainable peace and stability in the region. In light of the concerning security trends in countries in the region the Council may also reiterate its call for Member States to deescalate tensions and to immediately bring an end to violence against civilians. The PSC may also express its concern of the exacerbating effects of COVID19 in an already fragile region. It may further urge Member States to enhance their efforts towards implementing the PSCF to ensure stability in the region.