

Climate change and its impact on Island States in Africa

Automatic Heading TextDate | 09 September, 2019

Tomorrow (10 September) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold an open session on climate change and its impact on Island States in Africa.

The AU Commission, particularly the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture and a representative from the UN may brief the Council. Representatives from Island States in Africa may also deliver their statements.

The PSC has increasingly addressed the issue of climate change and its impact on peace and security. At its 828th session it highlighted that 'climate change is an existential multidimensional and multi-layered threat to local, national, regional and continental peace, security and stability'. The 864th session has also examined the humanitarian angle of climate change induced disasters.

Building on these PSC meetings, tomorrow's session aims at particularly addressing the unique challenges faced by Island States. The presentation by the AUC may provide an overview of the efforts and activities undertaken in the area of climate change particularly in the finalization of the African Climate Change Strategy. The presentation may also delve into how the strategy will aim at reflecting the particular needs of island states.

Although tomorrow's session covers issues of climate change wider than those relating to the mandate of the PSC, it could frame and focus its discussions in line with its mandate in facilitating 'humanitarian action and disaster management' in accordance with Article 7(p) of the PSC Protocol. Particularly in relation to disaster related displacement, the PSC through

complementary bodies including the African Standby Force may play a role in the management of disasters affecting Island States building on its session of 6 August on 'Natural and other disasters and peace and security in Africa'.

The discussions may also draw on the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) assessment missions undertaken in the six African Small Island Developing States (SIDS) namely Cape Verde, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe and the Seychelles starting from 2014. The mission report has stressed the vulnerability of SIDS to extreme events both sudden onset disasters including cyclones and to slow onset processes such as sea level rise. These challenges will require robust resilience and adaptation mechanisms as well as institutional arrangements for predicting and responding to climate change events particularly affecting such states.

When Cyclone Kenneth hit the east and South-eastern coast of Africa last April causing death of many people and destruction, it affected not only countries on mainland Africa including Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania but also island states particularly Comoros, Madagascar and Seychelles. This event has shown presents solid evidence on the threat of climate change induced disasters facing island states highlighted in the UNECA assessment.

The assessment report also highlighted that despite common characteristics, there are variations in terms of impact and capacity among the SIDS. While Cape Verde, Mauritius and Seychelles have better management and response capacity, the other SIDS may need particular attention in boosting their coping capacity.

In an effort of building regional support the first conference of the African SIDS and Madagascar (SIDSAM) held in 2016 officially formalized the creation of the African group of SIDS plus Madagascar.

In enhancing these efforts and drawing linkage with the mandate of the PSC on peace and security and humanitarian action, the PSC may recall its 774th session in which it has requested the AUC, 'within the context of the implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), to undertake a study on the nexus between climate change and peace and security in the continent with a particular attention on the plight of Island Member States.' The study may examine the various initiatives that have been undertaken in resilience and adaptation but also in terms of the threats it poses on some of the particu vulnerabilities facing island states of the continent.

Tomorrow's session may recall its previous decisions on climate change with a view to ensuring the needs and experiences of Island States is also well captured in the various climate change related engagements of the AU including in the work of the African Group of Negotiators on Climate Change as provided for in its 774th session outcome document.

In this context the PSC may also reiterate its 864th session on the 'need to expedite the finalization of the necessary institutional framework, with a view to expediting the operationalization of the PRC Sub-Committee on Climate Change'. This will be a critical step in supporting the mandate of PSC in deliberating on peace and security matters in the context and experience of SIDS. The sub-committee may play a wide role in tabling key issues that require the immediate attention of the PSC.

The early warning mechanism which are utilized for peace and security purposes may also expand towards incorporating indicators for purposes of climate change induced disaster and human crisis. The PSC may also receive early-warning briefings that are specific to the risks associated with SIDS and on how their vulnerability may also be a cause of insecurity. The early warning team in close collaboration with the PRC sub-committee on climate change (once operationalized) and the

climate change and disaster risk reduction divisions of the AUC, may provide the PSC up-to-date and regular briefings and data on the status of SIDS.

The PSC may utilize the session not only to remind the need for regional cooperation and solidarity but also to highlight the need to fulfil global commitments towards mitigation and adaptation support to developing countries by developed countries.

The session is taking place ahead of the high-level UN Climate Action Summit to be convened in September 2019 by the UN Secretary General. The PSC may particularly take advantage of the timing to craft key messages that can inform the summit in considering the vulnerabilities experienced by African SIDS. The expected outcome is a press statement. The PSC may stress the special vulnerabilities faced by Island States particularly SIDS due to the effects of climate change. It may call on for the speedy operationalization of existing mechanisms and institutions namely the AU Climate Change Strategy and the PRC sub-committee on climate change. The PSC may also express support for the SIDSAM group of states and their initiatives for addressing the particular challenges facing them as a result of climate change. It may also reiterate and call on AUC to finalize the study on nexus between climate change and peace and security with a dimension addressing the needs of African island states.