

Open session on Natural and Other Disasters and Peace and Security in Africa

Automatic Heading TextDate | 5 August, 2019

Tomorrow (6 August) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold the first open session of the month on 'Natural and Other Disasters and Peace and Security in Africa: Beyond the Normative Frameworks'. An expert from the Meteorological Services Department of Zimbabwe is expected to deliver a presentation. The AUC is also expected to make a statement, which among others, seeks to update the PSC on the operationalization of the AU Humanitarian Agency.

The session is being held in the aftermath of two major cyclone events that wreaked havoc in the east and South eastern coast of Africa, the worst cyclone events to hit the Southern hemisphere last March and May. Zimbabwe, the PSC Chair for this month, was among the countries affected by the first of the cyclones, Cyclone Idai that hit the South-eastern coast of Africa in March.

While Cyclone Idai affected Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, Cyclone Kenneth that hit the east and South-eastern coast of Africa causing death of many people and destruction in Mozambique, Tanzania, Comoros, Madagascar, Seychelles, Malawi and Mayotte Island. The cyclones resulted in the death of over 1000 people, in the destruction of farmlands, houses and public infrastructure such as schools and public health centres.

As these events show, Africa, while being the continent that contributed the least to the causes of climate change, is one of the parts of the world most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. It has been pointed out in a study by USAID

that globally 57 per cent of the countries facing the highest double burden of climate exposure and political fragility risks are located in sub-Saharan Africa. The UN led Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shown strong links between the impacts of climate change in Africa with some of the most intractable conflict on the continent. These conflicts are caused and exacerbated by existing structural environmental, socio-economic, political and technological weaknesses including environmental pressure over scarce resources, unemployment and poverty.

The agenda for tomorrow's session indicates that the objectives of the session include 'integrate climate information into infrastructure ecosystem and settlement plans' and identify 'innovative financing for reconstruction and climate sensitive infrastructure planning'. Indeed, the scale of the impact of the two cyclones reflects the weak state of the institutions and infrastructure of affected societies. The poor capacity of institutions and the state of the physical infrastructure and social services also contribute to poor mitigation, and response capacities.

The AU has policy frameworks to support member states in preparedness, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters including through the adoption of the program of action for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in Africa. According to the 2018 UN Secretary General report on the implementation of the Sendai Framework, only 13 African member states have national disaster risk reduction strategies that are aligned with the Sendai Framework. In terms of the role of the PSC, one of the roles assigned to the PSC under Article 6(4) of the PSC Protocol relates to humanitarian action and disaster management. The African Peace and Security Architecture Roadmap 2016-20 and the AU Master Roadmap for Silencing the Guns by 2020 also recognize climate change as a cross cutting issue.

The AU Humanitarian Policy Framework and its annex the policy guideline on the role of the African Standby Force in Humanitarian Action and Natural Disaster Support (HANDS) articulate practical steps in facilitating response and humanitarian action in complex crisis or emergencies. The role of ASF in HANDS is also anchored in the PSC Protocol. Article 13(f) of the Protocol highlights one of the key functions of the ASF as being the facilitation of “humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of civilian population in conflict areas and support efforts to address major natural disasters”.

While these policy frameworks and institutional awareness are important, these have not as yet translated into a coherent and sustained operational action. Accordingly, it is of major interest for tomorrow’s PSC meeting to look into the systematic inclusion of environment and the effects of climate change in the continent’s peace and security architecture and the development and security agenda of the AU, its member states and Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

The role of AU organs is also of interest. In this respect, it is worth noting that At its last ordinary session held in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights adopted Resolution 417 on Resolution on the human rights impacts of extreme weather in Eastern and Southern Africa due to climate change outlining specific measures for addressing the human rights dimension of extreme weather events such as the two cyclones that hit east and south-eastern Africa.

In terms of inclusion of issues of climate change into the peace and security architecture, an important avenue is the establishment, as part of the continental conflict early warning system, a dedicated framework of whether and climate forecasting not only for detecting and alerting vulnerable countries of emerging whether disasters but also for mobilizing responses for mitigating impacts of such events and rehabilitating affected communities. As noted in the concept

note for tomorrow's session, this can be done by tapping into the expertise of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), which can play the role of supporting early warning and preparedness work. The contribution that the WMO can make has also been recognized at the global level when the organization has addressed the UNSC for the first time during the January 2019 open debate.

As noted above, tomorrow's session will discuss the operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency and its role in responding to natural and other form of disasters. The council has highlighted its expectation to see the full operationalization of the agency by January 2019 and has frequently called for the swift completion of the process.

Tomorrow's session is expected to provide an opportunity to review the progress that has been made so far and outstanding issues for the full operationalization of the Agency.

Also of interest for tomorrow's session is the integration into the strategies and action plans of the AU Humanitarian Agency dedicated tools and capacity for mobilizing intervention and resources for climate resilient infrastructure planning and for the anticipation, management and mitigation of climate induced disasters in Africa.

The PSC has thus far held five sessions on the impact of climate change induced crises in Africa. This session presents an opportunity for reviewing the evolution of PSC's consideration of the impact of climate change in Africa and gaps in the PSC's approach and AU's responsiveness to climate change related disasters on the continent.

The expected outcome of the session is a press statement. The PSC may reiterate the importance of comprehensive, climate related security risk information, including credible data and analyses with a view to enabling Member States to predict with more precision the frequency of climate change related risks, including natural disasters, and to enhance resilience of

vulnerable communities. It may also urge for increased allocation of national budgets for disaster risk preparedness and reduction and for integration into development finance of support for climate resilient infrastructural planning and community development interventions. The PSC may endorse the call of Resolution 417 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for the AU to declare the year 2021 the AU Year for Climate Change preparedness and response. It may also call on the AUC to expedite the operationalization of the AU Humanitarian Agency and the inclusion, as part of the finalization of the outcomes of the study on the nexus between climate change and peace and security (mandated through its 774th session), of assessment on Africa's vulnerability to climate induced disaster and the measures required for mitigation and response.