

Open session on Prevention of the Ideology of Hate, Genocide and Hate Crimes in Africa

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Tomorrow (3 April) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold its 836th meeting. In this first open session of the month, the focus will be on prevention of the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa.

The Department of Political Affairs of the AU is expected to brief the PSC through its director Khabele Matlosa. The UNOAU is also expected to deliver a briefing. Apart from the opening statement the PSC Chair of the month, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye of Nigeria is expected to deliver a statement.

The open session is taking place following the 678th PSC session on 11 April 2017, which made a decision 'to convene, annually in April, a PSC open meeting on hate crimes and fighting genocide ideology in Africa'. Unlike the previous 678th and the 761st meetings, tomorrow's session will be open and is expected to allow the participation a wide range of stakeholders.

The session, as indicated in the concept note has two objectives: to debate and identify the means to collectively prevent the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa and to learn from Rwanda's experience of reconciliation, nation building as well as best practices on preventing the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa. Hence, the session beyond serving as an act of remembrance and expression of the pledge of 'never again', it seeks to shed light on the root causes and drivers of hate

speech and ideology that evolve into ethnic cleansing and genocide.

In terms of denial of the genocide against the Tutsi, it is expected that the briefing from Khabele is expected to highlight the forms and manifestations of the denial of genocide and the need for fighting denial in all its forms including the propagation of information questioning or creating doubt about the target group, the number of victims and the legal validity of designating the well organized and systematically executed mass murder of the Tutsi as genocide.

It was against this background that the 761st session of the PSC held on 5 April 2018 emphasized the importance of the use of appropriate terminology and accurate analysis in order to avoid the risk of genocide denial and revisionism. The Assembly of the AU Summit held in Nouakchott, Mauritania in July 2018 in its decision Assembly/ AU / Dec.695 endorsed the decision of the PSC that corrected the nomenclature of the Genocide that happened in Rwanda to be: "The 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda". Moreover the Assembly endorsed the decision of the same PSC session to designate 7th April of each year as the African Union day of Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

The terminology of the event and the commemorative day has also been corrected globally. Since April 7 2004, the UN General Assembly has recognized the atrocities committed in Rwanda as an "International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda". On 26 January 2018, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a decision on the "International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda", correcting ambiguities in previous resolution by naming the Tutsis as the main target group for extermination.

Another key issue that is expected to be highlighted during this session is the need to combat impunity in relation to the genocide against the Tutsi. As indicated in the concept note

for the session, 980 indictments and international arrest warrants have been issued for suspects residing in more than 30 countries in the world. In this context the Council may reiterate the appeal made in previous session for member states 'to investigate, arrest, prosecute or extradite those fugitives accused as genocide perpetrators currently residing in their territories'.

With respect to the ideology of genocide and hate crimes, the session is expected to emphasize the need to strengthening early warning mechanisms and prevention measures both at the continental and national level. The Council members may highlight the need to strengthen AU's early warning mechanism to anticipate and monitor early signs of situations, which could lead to violent conflicts and genocide, if not prevented through early action. Members may also recall the decisions of the 761st session which called on member states to 'enact laws and put in place legal frameworks that penalize hate speeches, ideologies of extremism among religious groups, as well as marginalization and discrimination of ethnic and tribal groups'.

The open session may also build on previous year's PSC meeting, which broadened the scope of possible instigating factors for hate crimes and ideology of genocide by particularly focusing on hate speeches, identity-based conflicts, hatred, exacerbation of ethnic division and racist tendencies. Unchecked religious extremism was also recognized in fostering new grounds for hate speeches. In this regard, the council made commitments to promote religious tolerance, as a means to prevent hate crimes and ideologies of genocide in the continent. The importance of awareness creation and educational measures in fighting hate crimes and the risks of violence targeting particular ethnic groups or religious groups is worth mentioning.

The media's role both as an instrument to create social cohesion but also the adverse effects of its misuse to incite

hatred may be of interest for Council members and participants. In this period of fake news and right wing populism, the role of media in general and that of such social media in particular deserves particular attention. The new media platforms in particular are increasingly shaping political narratives and the potential threats associated with it. Beyond and above, the media reforms, the strengthening of adherence to principles and ethics of journalism identified in the concept note as some of the mitigating factors, there is also the need to develop monitoring mechanisms and effective regulatory frameworks.

As an open session, the expected outcome is ordinarily a press statement, although the PSC may decide otherwise. Apart from reiterating its previous call for AU member states and other states that host individuals suspected of being involved in the 1994 genocide to take concrete steps by investigating and prosecuting or by extraditing the suspects, the PSC may urge all stakeholders to implement measures that promote tolerance, cohesion and respect for diversity including through school curricula and media policy and interventions. Building on the outcome of its previous session particularly the 761st session and in the light of the risks arising from the abuse or misuse of the new media platforms and the need for strengthening the existing legal and institutional framework, the PSC may call for the elaboration a consolidated normative standard including a model law on the ideology of genocide and hate crimes, which the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is able to deliver.