

VTC Session on Silencing the Guns in Africa

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Tomorrow (17 November) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold its session to discuss the status of implementation of the “AU Master Roadmap for Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020” and the “AU Theme of the Year 2020: Silencing the Guns in Africa – Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development”. The session is scheduled to be held through VTC.

The Director for the Department of Peace and Security, Admore Kambudzi, is expected to present a briefing on the session’s agenda. This is expected to share the review of the implementation of the Master Roadmap and the progress made, if any, and challenges relating to the theme of the year on silencing the guns in Africa. Tomorrow’s session serves as an occasion for taking stock of the theme of the year and to reflect on the revision of the Master Roadmap, as 2020 is coming to an end. It is also to be recalled that preparations are underway for the convening of an extraordinary summit dedicated to the theme of the year in December. For PSC members, this is a session for preparing for and reflecting on the issues that will inform the extraordinary summit.

Silencing the Guns is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063 of the AU. It provides the overarching objective guiding the efforts of the organization in ensuring a peaceful and secure Africa which is the foundation for the implementation of Agenda 2063. It is to be recalled that AU member states made a solemn commitment as part of the Solemn Declaration of the 50th Anniversary of the O/AU, “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 had submitted a Master Roadmap of practical steps to Silencing the Guns by 2020, which was endorsed by the Assembly in January 2017. In relation to the AU theme of the year for 2020, series of multistakeholder virtual engagements have been organized by the Peace and Security Department focusing on thematic issues related to silencing the guns. These engagements aimed at not only mobilizing public awareness and engagement but also to address some of the key developments and challenges in implementing the theme of the year, in the wake of COVID-19. The outcomes of these engagements are expected to feed into the upcoming extraordinary summit next month.

In recent years, progress has been made in resolving some of the most intractable conflicts in Africa. However, by the AU’s own admission, some of the limited progresses achieved thus far in places such as Sudan, South Sudan and Central African Republic are a far cry compared to the lofty goals and objectives set out in the AU Master Roadmap for silencing the guns in Africa or compared to the recent trends in the deterioration of the peace and security conditions of the continent. Africa no doubt continues to face serious threats to its peace and stability.

Some parts of Africa remain mired in conflict and new challenges to peace and security have emerged. Governance deficits continue to present fertile conditions for the persistence and emergence of wide range of security issues including conflicts, terrorism, organized crime and armed insurgencies. Short of that, the worsening of governance issues 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 political upheavals.

Most notably, the mismanagement of diversity and zero-sum 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. The situation in many fragile countries in Africa has been further complicated by the multiple impacts of the COVID-19 pandemics, which has overwhelmed weak health systems, shattered economies, and caused political instability and crisis.

Clearly, Africa is far from the AU's ambition of silencing the guns. A lot remains to be done and it has to be done differently. All indications are that, the goal of silencing the guns cannot be achieved in a business as usual approach to the management of the affairs of the countries of the continent and indeed peace and security in Africa. AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa Ramtane Lamamra stressed "the need to review and adjust our conflict prevention and resolution tools in order to effectively and efficiently respond to the everchanging nature of conflict, violence and criminality on the continent". He also underscored the need to "reduce the gap between strategic political and military efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, on one hand, and investment in economic and social development, on the other hand". Furthermore, he emphasized the need to build a culture of peace and tolerance.

Within the framework of the amnesty month for the surrender and collection of illegal weapons which is held every September, tomorrow's session also serves to receive update on the PSC's request from its 943rd session that 'a lessons-learned study, that covers the experiences of the conduct and commemoration of the Africa Amnesty Month, implementation of various national programs that were implemented outside the

Amnesty Month, and submit to the PSC in the course of 2020'. It is also notable as highlighted in the communiqué of the 943rd session, the challenges of illicit arms and weapons goes beyond collection of weapons and requires addressing plethora of issues. This should continue to receive particular attention.

Considering the new global geo-political dynamics, enhancing the role of the African Union and its regional mechanisms in the promotion and maintenance of peace and security in Africa is not an option. It is to be recalled that the PSC at its 868th meeting, the PSC strongly condemned external interference into African peace and security issues.

The institutional reforms underway will be critical, this is particularly the case in terms of strengthening the governance and security architectures as well as the synergies between them to accelerate efforts towards silencing the guns in Africa. Within the reform process, ensuring greater coordination and synergy between the African Union and its regional mechanisms is also vital. Furthermore, the revitalization of the African Union Peace Fund will contribute to addressing the financing needs of the African Union 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 in the first instance the responsibility of the AU and its Member States, their people, and their institutions, including civil society.

This effort towards mobilizing intra-African resources for financing peace and security has to be done with due recognition of the fact that peace and security in Africa is a global public good and hence required the support and

partnership of the international community. Accordingly, partnership with UN and other international partners remains crucial. The adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2457 (2019) on silencing the guns in Africa is indeed a step in the right direction but that has to be translated into concrete action through practical cooperation between the UN and the AU to silence the guns in different parts of the continent. It also behooves the UNSC to respond positively to the longstanding request by the AU for access to financial support for AU peace support operations authorized by the UNSC from the UN assessed contributions.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. It is expected that the PSC will propose to the AU Assembly that the focus on silencing the guns is extended beyond 2020 as part of the first ten-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 running from 2013 to 2023. The PSC, while welcoming some of the limited progress made in some of the conflict situations such as CAR, South Sudan and Sudan, may also urge that efforts for sustaining progress registered in these situations are redoubled to prevent any slide back to conflict. Against the background of the lessons from the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap during the past three years and the deterioration of the security situation on the continent, it may also propose that the Master Roadmap is updated to ensure that a more effective approach is mobilized for addressing the peace and security challenges on the continent.