

Youth, Peace and Security in Africa

Automatic Heading TextDate | 23 June, 2020

Tomorrow (23 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to have its 932nd session on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa. The briefing from the Peace and Security Department (PSD) is circulated to the members of the PSC in a written statement, which will be circulated to the members.

It is expected that PSC member states will conduct the session remotely and share their input via email communication. Subsequently, the PSC Secretariat together with the Chairperson are expected to draft a communiqué and circulate for its adoption through silence procedure.

The 807th inaugural PSC meeting on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) was held on 8 November 2018. At the end of the session the PSC decided to institutionalize the agenda by dedicating an annual session on the theme. During the same meeting the PSC requested the Commission to undertake a study on the role of the youth in promoting peace and security in Africa and to finalize the Continental Framework on YPS and appoint the five African Youth Peace Ambassadors (AYPA), who among others, work with the AU Youth Envoy.

The PSC held the second session on YPS on 15 November 2019. The focus of the session was to “review actions undertaken since the inaugural (807th) PSC open session on 8 November 2018”. In addition, the session also received presentation on ‘the Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa’. It was also at this session that the five African youth ambassadors for youth were introduced and presented to the PSC. It is to be recalled that subsequently,

the 33rd AU Summit endorsed the appointed ambassadors and requested the Commission to institutionalize the Y4P Program within the PSD with a dedicated desk.

Tomorrow's session is a follow up to the previous year's open session and will afford the Council with the opportunity to consider the revised drafts of the Continental Framework on YPS and the 'Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa'. Accordingly, the PSD's briefing is expected to provide an overview on the joint work undertaken by the Commission and the PSC committee of experts in finalizing the continental framework and in providing additional inputs in the study. With regards to the continental framework the briefing may shed light on its objectives and its five priority areas namely: participation, prevention, protection, partnership and coordination as well as disengagement and reintegration.

The central objective of the framework is to ensure the active engagement of the African youth in all aspects of peace and security. The framework also aims at tackling the hindrances to the active participation of the youth including limitation related to financial and technical capacity of youth initiatives and limited role of youth in formal peacebuilding initiatives.

The second part of the briefing is expected to provide update on the progress of the study. The rationale behind the study is to document and adequately portray the active contribution of youth in peace and security in Africa. A similar study conducted by the UN 'The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security' interrogates existing stereotypes related to youth and violence and illustrates the relationship between youth, government and communities and youth's participation in political, economic and social aspects.

It is of interest for members of the PSC to review persisting challenges limiting the active role of the youth. In this

respect, some of the issues affecting the youth include structural limitations and cultural attitudes, requirements for experience for their engagement in institutional activities for peace and the lack of space and access to platforms for peace processes. Consideration of these and related issues affecting youth, particularly young women, is critical to identify the concrete initiatives and measures that member states and the AU should take to support and strengthen the role of youth, including their participation in AU peace processes.

In terms of following up on the 33rd AU Assembly decision on institutionalizing the AU program on youth peace and security in the Department of Peace and Security, an issue of interest for PSC members is the steps taken to implement this decision and how the PSC could support the full implementation of this decision. The briefing from the PSD may call on strengthened financial and technical support for youth led projects.

The briefing from the PSD may also put forward recommendations for the adoption of the two documents. The priority areas of the continental framework are informed by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015). An important aspect of tomorrow's session is accordingly to discuss the opportunities for effective inclusion of youth in peace processes. It would also be of interest to the PSC to review and assess the benchmarks under the various pillars of participation, prevention, protection, partnership and coordination and disengagement and reintegration. In the light of concerning trends mainly the spread of radicalization and violent extremism on the continent over the years and its impact on the youth, it would be of interest to the PSC to examine mechanisms to support the youth in regions affected by activities of terrorist operations to help prevent radicalization and their involvement in any actions related to terrorism and violent extremism.

The subsequent UNSC resolution on YPS, 2419 (2018) further

called for a more robust youth participation in peace efforts at national, regional and global levels. One particular aspect that is underscored in the resolution, which may also be of interest to the PSC is around gender inequalities that put young women at particular risk. This offers the PSC to also recommit to the empowerment of young women and gender equality and to call on all member states to eliminate all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and to protect young women.

There is a need to streamline policies and programs at the Commission level as well in close collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanisms (RMs) and member states. The PSC may encourage a closer partnership between RECs and the five regional African Youth Peace Ambassadors (AYAP). It may also urge member states that have not done so to ratify the African Youth Charter and to develop national youth policies in line with the Charter's Article 12.

Tomorrow's session is also taking place within the context of COVID19 pandemic. The AU Youth Envoy has noted the unprecedented impact on educational systems and youth employment. It would be critical for the PSC to also assess the adverse consequences of closure of schools and unemployment on youth's role in peace and security, respect for the rights of young women and in fighting radicalization and extremism.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may recognize the agency and active role of youth in peace efforts. It may also underline the need to address the structural challenges that hinder their active engagement in peace efforts including in formal mediation and prebuilding processes. The PSC may commend the work undertaken by the Commission and for completing the various frameworks requested by the PSC. The PSC may welcome the recommendations put forward by PSD in the briefing note. The Council may decide to adopt the two documents of the continental framework and the study. The PSC may also note the importance of policy harmonization and

coordination among the various stakeholders namely the Y4P, Office of the Youth Envoy, the five regional ambassadors and relevant departments in the Commission to ensure that the YPS agenda is implemented in a coherent manner. The PSC could also require that particular attention is given to the gender dimension of the role of youth in order to ensure that issues affecting young women are recognized and addressed.