

# Briefing on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons

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Tomorrow (14 March) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to receive a briefing on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and its impact on the AU plan for Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020. The PSC is expected to receive briefing from the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA). The AU Peace and Security Department (PSD), particularly its division on Defense and Security is expected to brief. Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms are also expected to share their experiences.

The session is initiated by Kenya as the Chair of the month and host of RECSA. As the concept note for the session developed by Kenya indicates, the aim is to identify concrete actions to address the proliferation and circulation of illicit weapons and ammunition in line with the provisions of AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns. The concept note makes reference to the Silencing the Guns Continental Plan of Action (STG-PoA) that is currently being developed by the African Union Commission (AUC) as a framework to operationalize the Master Roadmap. The briefing will also offer an overview of the success and challenges of the efforts undertaken against the proliferation of illicit weapons by particularly focusing on the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region. At its 778th session the PSC stated that 'illicit flow of arms, particularly small arms and light weapons (SALW), to non-state actors contributes significantly towards various parts of Africa'. exacerbating insecurity and violence in Following its 824th meeting held on February 5 2019, the

Council, in a press statement, emphasized the centrality of national institutions in the fight against the proliferation of SALW and further urged 'Member States to invest more in building and further strengthening their capacities to effectively safeguard national stockpiles of weapons, with a view to preventing weapons and ammunition from falling into wrong hands'.

Building on this, the session is expected to discuss the role of regional organizations and inter-state coordination in mitigating the proliferation and accumulation of illicit arms. AU peace and security frameworks including the Silencing the Guns Roadmap recognize the role of RECs/RMs to design and monitor tailored policy instruments that addresses the specific security situation in their respective regions.

In line with the session's objective, the briefing by RECSA may provide an overview of the impact of flow of illicit arms and gaps in control measures on peace, stability and development. RECSA's intervention is expected to shed light on the recent political developments in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions and their impact in fostering regional cooperation to eradicate illicit flows of arms and weapons. It may also make reference to the UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspect and the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa in order to identify practical steps towards accountability and regulation of non-states actors possession SALW.

The briefing from PSD may highlight challenges around regulatory frameworks, including the lack of protection and management of stockpiles which often lead to diversion of legally sourced arms by illegal non-state actors. The intervention may emphasize on the importance of compliance with international and regional legally binding instruments, including the universal ratification and implementation of the

Arms Trade Treaty, as well as the need to strengthen national legislations and institutions. PSD may also speak on the draft AU policy for the management of recovered arms and ammunitions in peace support operations.

The Assembly decision Assembly/AU/Dec. 645 (XXIX) adopted by the 29th Ordinary Session of the AU, has declared the month of September of each year until 2020, as "Africa Amnesty Month" for the surrender and collection of illegally owned weapons and arms. During the commemoration in September 2018 the PSC has urged RECs/RMs to submit reports to the Council, through the AU Commission, on the actions taken in line with the Africa Amnesty Month.

The AUC has also been leading on the development of technical and operational guidelines by the Council to inform national and regional efforts in undertaking activities under the Africa Amnesty Month and a compendium of the success stories and best practices across the continent in implementing voluntary disarmament programs. The PSD may provide status update on the development of such instruments and on following up on national measures.

PSC members may discuss the increased link between the circulation of small arms, terrorism and proliferation of rebel armed movements. The UNSC resolution 2457 on Silencing the Guns in Africa adopted on 27 February 2019 underscored 'the need for effective implementation of relevant arms control and disarmament instruments and regimes as well as arm embargoes imposed by the United Nations Security Council'. The PSC may urge member states and regional organizations to take measurable actions against the proliferation of illicit weapons and arms, including through the strengthening the criminal justice response and enhancing law enforcement institutions. The PSC may also follow on UNSC resolution 2457, urging international actors to take specific measures of cooperation including in terms of effective regulation of the sale and movement of small arms and light weapons and

supporting the sanctioning of illicit flows.

At the time of production of this insight the form that the outcome of the session takes was unknown. The PSC could consider urging member states to strengthen their capacities to vigorously monitor and protect national stockpiles of weapons and recover illegally owned arms. The Council may also call on RECs/RMs to complement the efforts of member states and assist them in developing and implementing national action plans and regional cooperation to curb illicit proliferation of arms. The PSC may reiterate its previous decision by urging compliance with international and regional legal frameworks and task the AU Commission to submit a report on the trends and dynamics of illicit flow of small arms and light weapons and progress made and challenges faced in implementing continentally and regionally agreed measures. The PSC may call on member states in transition from conflict to undertake sustainable disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs to prevent relapse to violence and conflict.