

Briefing on Transnational Organized Crime and Peace and Security in Africa

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Tomorrow (25 April) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to have its 845th session on Transnational Organized Crime and Peace and Security in Africa. The briefing is expected to be conducted jointly by the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) and International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

The session is expected to highlight the need for enhanced cooperation for police agencies and other relevant law enforcement agencies in fighting all forms of organized crime with the aim of promoting peace and security in Africa. The session also presents an opportunity to elaborate on the nature of the threat of transnational organized crime in the continent and highlight the ongoing efforts by AFRIPOL, INTERPOL and CISSA in providing support to member states to fight organized crime in Africa, particularly due to the growing linkage between transnational organized crime and terrorism.

During the 731st meeting held on 8 November 2017 the PSC underlined 'the direct linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime particularly in situations where state institutions are weak and lack the necessary capacity to effectively discharge their constitutional mandates'. Among others, organized crime has enhanced the ability of terrorist groups to finance their activities and this has contributed to the proliferation of violent extremist groups in the continent.

Similarly the INTERPOL-ENACT (Enhancing African capacity to respond more effectively to transnational organized crime) report released in December 2018 concluded that crimes are increasingly converging in Africa, underlining how transnational threats cannot be treated in isolation by particularly highlighting the interconnectedness between transnational organized crime and violent extremism. Criminals, terrorists and armed insurgents have benefited from diverse illicit activities and profits, through drug and arms trafficking, people smuggling and wildlife crime. The rapid technological development in Africa including its e-commerce and mobile technologies has come with the inadvertent consequences of the rise of cybercrime and illicit online activities.

Geographically as well organized crime is increasingly interconnected across the region and globally, hence in order to respond effectively to the threats the efforts by member states need to be more coordinated and move beyond national boundaries. In this context, the establishment of AFRIPOL, as a technical body for cooperation among the police agencies of the AU member states play a critical role in providing systematic and structured cooperation among police agencies in the continent. This has also been recognized by the PSC 731st session which underlined the importance of 'collective security approaches in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime... and the core need for information and intelligence sharing among the relevant security agencies of the member states'.

Towards fostering regional cooperation the PSC, at its 687th meeting held in May 2017, requested the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), CISSA and AFRIPOL in partnership with other stakeholders to develop a five year strategic roadmap for the prevention and combating of terrorism and violent extremism. This is expected to advance synergies and coherence among partners and mandate holders, by

preventing duplication of efforts. Tomorrow's session will also offer an opportunity to discuss ongoing efforts and coordination among the various institutes towards the common goal of fighting organized crime the interrelated activities of terrorism and violence extremism. In line with the PSC decision, AFRIPOL and CISSA may provide update on the development of the roadmap.

Similarly these efforts of coordination can be further enhanced by following up on the PSC decision that has requested the Commission to urgently prepare and submit to the Council, an updated matrix of status of implementation of all decisions adopted by Council including on transnational organized crime. The PSC may also recall this previous decision and follow up on the activities of the Commission.

The evolving nature of transnational organized crime requires that member states continue to review and update their responses in line with the changing environment. In this regard the briefing is expected to provide an overview of how INTERPOL and AFRIPOL work closely with member states towards strengthening the capacities of the national police agencies in adopting a comprehensive approach that takes into consideration the transnational nature of organized crime. The agreement signed between the AU and INTERPOL in January 2019, is also in recognition of the borderless nature of organized crime and to enhance cooperation between INTERPOL and AFRIPOL in areas of common interest, including in the exchange of data and information, technical cooperation, and training and capacity building.

It is also worth noting that transnational organized crime and illicit economy have become extremely complex and continue to evolve. The overlaps between the licit and illicit economies are significant, and it becomes increasingly difficult to draw distinction between them. Hence this requires coordination beyond law enforcement authorities by also building close cooperation with financial institutions, legal entities

performing legal and financial services and financial intelligence offices. In this regard, the 749th PSC session that was held at heads of state and government level have called on 'member states to take the required measures to dry up the flow of terrorism financing, by cutting the links between terrorist organizations and organized crime, including trafficking, smuggling and illicit trade.'

The situation is even more intricate with the increasing trends of criminal networks operating in Africa but with the support of criminals from outside the continent engaged in the various forms of crimes of trafficking and smuggling of illicit products and resources. The continent is becoming more entangled in a global network of illicit economic networks. This key aspect necessitates the shift from traditional responses towards organized crime that are designed to operate within national borders towards evidence based and coordinated approach at regional and global level.

The expected outcome is a press statement. The PSC may provide strategic guidance to member states, Regional Economic Communities/ Regional Mechanisms, and the AUC on ways to strengthen the capacities of the police authorities and agencies in combating transnational organized crime and deter its impact on the peace and security of the continent.