

Commemoration of the African Border Day within the framework of the AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns in Africa

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Tomorrow (11 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to have its 930th session on 'Commemoration of the African Border Day within the framework of the AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns in Africa'.

The briefing on the agenda of the session prepared by the Department of Peace and Security is circulated to all PSC members via email. The Chairperson of the PSC for June has also circulated the concept note for the session. It is expected that PSC member states will conduct the session remotely via email exchanges. Following receipt of their input via email, the PSC Secretariat together with the Chairperson are expected to draft communiqué and circulate for its adoption through silence procedure.

The African Border Day is commemorated annually in line with the decision of the 17th Ordinary session of the Executive Council. As in the past, this year's commemoration is linked with the annual theme of the year. As highlighted in the concept note, the AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns identifies non-completion of border delimitation and demarcation processes, porous borders and the lack of borders control and security systems as posing challenge to peace and security in Africa.

This session is accordingly expected to provide updates to PSC

member states on the progress made and challenges faced in implementing the practical steps set out in the AU Master Roadmap for overcoming the peace and security challenges arising from the conditions of the borders of African states. As various developments during the course of the past year, including the upsurge in violence in the Sahel – on account of both terrorist attacks and inter-communal fighting which have become more fatal due to easy access to and circulation of weapons – and the destruction that terrorist networks caused in Mozambique, have shown, porousness of African borders and the lack of effective control of borders continues to create the context for insecurity and violence.

On the occasion of the celebration of the Africa Border Day on 7 June, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui underlined borderland's vulnerability to insecurity and socio-economic challenges and the importance of securing the stability of borderlands for the realization of the goals of Silencing the Guns initiative. Indeed, major consequences of weak system of governance of borderlands include the flow of illegal weapons and small arms, the movement of international organized crimes and terrorist groups as well human trafficking and irregular migration fueling violence and exacerbating insecurity.

Various factors including the presence of mineral and hydrocarbon resources, the rising demand for land and other resources due to population increase and climate change, the increasing need to secure borders from terrorist and criminal networks as well as the increasing interest for harnessing of maritime resources for development purposes have heightened the need for addressing existing problems in the governance of borders of member states in Africa.

Apart from land borders, maritime boundary dispute, often triggered by competing claims over natural resources, has also become a concerning area. Additionally, as the experiences in the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Guinea have revealed, maritime

domain have been highly volatile and exposed to piracy, organized crime and utilized for human and drug trafficking as well as illegal fishing and dumping of waste by operations from developed countries. Towards protecting this particular area, the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lome Charter) adopted in 2016 to prevent and control the wide range of transnational crime at sea and to ensure member states benefit from maritime resources. However, the charter is currently ratified only by one country.

The AU Border Program (AUBP) progress report is expected to highlight developments relating to policies, processes and initiatives relating to borders and to the implementation of the Program. The update presented in the report is organized and will be presented around the five areas of work of the AU Borders Programme— a) development of national border policies and strategies, b) delimitation and demarcation of borders, c) cross border cooperation, d) capacity building, and e) Implementation of AUBP at the regional level.

In terms of delimitation and demarcation, the AUBP has thus far contributed to the delimitation of more than 5000 km border in 25 countries. However, available data shows that only about 35% of the continent's terrestrial international boundaries have been demarcated. As noted in the concept note for tomorrow's session and highlighted in the AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns as one of the practical steps, it is envisaged that the delimitation and demarcation of AU Member States borders have to be completed by 2022. Despite the amount of work done thus far and currently under way, there is concern that the new timeline of having African boundaries fully delimited and demarcated by 2022 would again be missed, as the progress report noted. In this respect, major issues that require attention in tomorrow's session include the identification of the various factors that impeded delimitation and demarcation of borders making it impossible

to meet the 2022 deadline and the development of a realistic plan to address them.

Other areas of work with respect of which the report highlights progress since the last report are capacity building, national and regional border policies and strategies, coordination within the AU and with RECs. The work done in these areas also show that the AUBP is serving as instrument for strengthening of the capacities of personnel in charge of border issues and in contributing towards the development of national and regional border policies and strategies. However, the progress report highlights a concern about the fate of the program under the new structure of the AU Commission, expected to come into effect in 2021.

Another item of particular importance covered in the AUBP progress report is cross border cooperation. This has been one of the issues that has been put under strain as member states of the AU out of an abundance of caution initiate closure of borders as part of the effort to contain the virus. In the context of the AU theme of 2020, the issue of cross border cooperation is key, as noted in the AU Master Roadmap, in terms of conflict prevention and controlling terrorism, other cross-border crimes and piracy, among others.

One of the most important legal and policy instruments of the AU for advancing cross border cooperation is the Niamey Convention on Cross Border Cooperation. While this Convention was adopted in June 2014, thus far 17 AU Member States have signed it and only five (Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin, and Senegal) have ratified it. The ratification of ten (10) more countries is required to bring the Convention into effect. The ratification and implementation of this Convention is critical not only for enhancing legitimate system of border governance and cooperation but also to support the implementation of some of AU's instruments for regional integration notably the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and the Protocol to the Abuja Treaty on Free Movement of Persons, Rights of

Residence and Establishment. In terms of normative developments, an important development is the AU Strategy for Better Integrated Border Governance adopted during the 33rd AU Summit in February 2020. The Assembly recommended that the implementation of the strategy should be undertaken in accordance with Article 4(b) of the AU 'respect of borders existing on achievement of independence' which is also echoed in the PSC protocol. The strategy covers a wide array of matters and it's premised on five core pillars: development of capabilities for border governance, conflict prevention and resolution, mobility, migration and trade facilitation, cooperative border management and borderland development and community engagement.

Also of note, during tomorrow's session is the relationship between public health and effective and legitimate border governance in Africa in the context of the novel coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic. As AU Commissioner for Peace and Security noted in his statement 'the impact of COVID19 places the issue of governance of African borders at the heart of the response to the pandemic'. Within the current pandemic, border management and governance are particularly critical to monitor, detect and prevent the spread of the virus across and in between countries. While member states have adopted closure of borders as one of the measures for containing the spread of the virus, Chergui also pointed out in his statement the efforts undertaken so far through AUBP towards limiting the spread of virus through cross border cooperation and stabilization of border areas. He also underscored the need for strong cross border cooperation for cross border management of public health in Africa.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may welcome and call on member states to implement the AU Strategy for Better Integrated Border Governance. It may urge governments to scale up their efforts in strengthening border governance to prevent conflicts, enhance cross-border cooperation and to better

harmonize efforts in responding collectively for mutual interest. Particularly in light of the current challenges in relation COVID19 it may underline the importance of coordination and cooperation among member states on border management. It may further call on member states to ratify all the relevant frameworks including the Niamey Convention and the Lome Maritime Charter to ensure the security of borderlands as well as maritime boundaries. The PSC may underscore the important role of the AUBP in advancing the various goals of the AU including peace and security and regional integration through supporting peaceful settlement of border disputes, capacity building support for enhancing border governance and in advocating for speeding up the ratification and implementation of the various instruments. In terms of conflict prevention, it may underscore the need to monitor and identify major risks of border conflicts for timely deployment of preventive measures. With respect to the 2022 deadline for the completion of the delimitation and demarcation of African borders, the PSC could task the AUBP to submit a report with analysis of the issues impeding delimitation and demarcation and proposal on how these can be addressed and on the additional time required for completing this project.