

Consideration of the Mapping Study on Illicit Arms Flows in Africa

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Tomorrow (18 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will consider the mapping study on illicit arms flow in Africa.

The Peace and Security Department (PSD) and the Small Arms Survey are expected to brief the council and present the main findings of the mapping study. The joint study has been conducted pursuant to the 430th PSC decision that tasked 'the Commission to undertake a comprehensive study on the flow of illicit weapons into and within Africa and submit to it the outcome of such a study'.

Following this decision the AU Commission, jointly with the Small Arms Survey, has co-organized the inception meeting on mapping illicit arms flows in Africa, in June 2017. The press release at the inception meeting indicated that the study aims at producing data on patterns and trends in arms and ammunition inflows, diversion and illicit circulation, and gaps in control measures. The study also serves to equip the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member states with relevant tools to 'prevent the flow of illegal arms and ammunition into conflict zones, implement evidence-based policies and better measure progress and impact in line with the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020'.

The study has been underway over the past two years including the validation by RECs and international experts in 2018. Following tomorrow's consideration by the PSC, the study will be launched and presented to the various stakeholders in the

AU headquarters.

The study is expected to establish a continental data and analysis that identifies regions and countries affected by illicit arms flow and trends in the illicit production, trade, possession, stockpile and circulation of arms. The data and analysis may also identify sources and patterns of movement and circulation of arms. This study is essential given the complexity of the issue and the absence of a continental binding instrument and a dedicated continental mechanism that can monitor trade and illicit arms flows and track their effects on peace and security. Currently the Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons is the only existing continental instrument but it only expresses political rather than legal commitment. Hence its implementation and impact has been limited. Additionally, there is not a continent-wide dedicated mechanism for promoting the standards of the Declaration.

The various RECs have established frameworks within their respective regions. Although this is a positive step, it has resulted in parallel legal regimes and made response fragmented. Even in regions that have instruments, implementation is still lacking. The very nature of the flows of illicit weapons necessitates a kind of response that is trans-regional and a standardized continental framework. The fragmented response has also left regions such as the Sahel without an established instrument.

Although the 832nd PSC session underlined the primary responsibility of member states in combating illicit circulation of arms, however their capacities are limited. A related challenge is the porous nature of the borders of many African countries and their inability to regulate their peripheral territories. Member states' limited capacity and resources in putting in place effective administrative and institutional measures for safe stockpiling of arms has

affected the safekeeping and control of arms. In this regard there is a need for the AUC to provide guidance and technical support on ways member states adequately monitor and track illicit arms as well as produce reports on their efforts and the challenges that are encountered as a follow up to the various calls of the PSC for receiving reports from member states. Hence institutional support to member states for the development of national strategy and reporting will enable relevant national institutions in discharging their roles for effective control of flow of arms.

Previous PSC sessions have made reference to the linkages between the proliferation and illicit flows of arms on the one hand and terrorism, organized crime and financing of terrorist groups. Additionally, there is a need to recognize the increased transnational nature of conflicts and how weak border control leads to porous borders that allows free movement of traffickers of arms across national borders.

Flows and circulation of illicit arms are particularly critical in conflict affected countries and post-conflict situations. The absence of effective implementation of DDR and SSR enables the proliferation of armed groups and the flow of illicit weapons, hampering cessation of hostilities and peace building processes. It may also contribute to potential relapse to violence by compromising gains made in restoring peace and security.

The PSC may also follow up on its previous decision at the 832nd, which requested 'the Commission to consider organizing a forum for the AU to constructively engage with weapons manufacturers'. Apart from being a shared area of interest for the UN Security Council (UNSC), this international dimension of the illicit manufacturing, trade and transfer to Africa of small arms and light weapons also necessitates developing close coordination and joint approach with the UNSC. The risks and challenges associated with illicit flow of arms have been regularly debated at the UNSC.

The UN Secretary-General submits biennial report on small arms and light weapons to UNSC. In the Resolution 2220 (2015), the Security Council requested the SG to continue to submit to the Council on a biennial basis a report on the issue of small arms and light weapons. Following this decision the SG has submitted its fifth report in December 2017. In this context, the growing concern over the increased links between transnational organized crime, illicit small-arms trafficking and terrorism as well as emerging technologies for illicit trafficking and production has received attention.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. It may express concern over illicit small arms and light weapons within the continent and from the outside. It may commend the AUC and Small Arms Survey for leading on the development of the continental mapping study on illicit arms flows in Africa. It may call on member states in strengthening their monitoring and control mechanisms and may urge for enhanced cooperation among countries and with relevant international bodies. The PSC is also expected to adopt the recommendations of the study and call for their implementation. In its deliberation the council may call for standardization of the norms and approaches of RECs for a more harmonized and coordinated approach. In terms of targeted action within the framework of the AU Roadmap on Silencing the Guns as well, the implementation of measures directed at countries most affected by illicit circulation and trade of small and light weapons such as Libya. The PSC could also emphasize issues related to partnership and international cooperation in tracing illicit flows and movement of arms, capacity building to member states for arms and ammunition management and information sharing including through the UNSC.