

Ministerial session on 'National Reconciliation, Restoration of Peace, Security and Rebuilding of Cohesion in Africa'

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Tomorrow (5 December 2019) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council is scheduled to hold a ministerial session under the theme 'National Reconciliation, Restoration of Peace, Security and Rebuilding of Cohesion in Africa'.

Apart from members of the PSC, non-PSC AU member states including Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Mali and Niger are also expected to participate at the ministerial meeting.

This theme was inscribed into the program of the month for December on the initiative of Angola. The session is also slated to take place in the capital Luanda. This is illustrative of the increasing regional and continental role Angola has come to play. It is to be recalled that in September Luanda played host to a major continental conference on the promotion of the culture of peace.

Indicating the significance of this session for Angola, the President of Angola, João Lourenço, is expected to open the session. Angola's experience with national reconciliation, restoration of peace, security and rebuilding of cohesion in the aftermath of the long civil war and the divisions it sowed is expected to be highlighted.

The ministerial session is expected to provide a platform to discuss and share the experience of participating states in national reconciliation and in building inclusive and stable societies. A number of issues would be of interest for PSC members. One such issue is to identify what kind of reconciliation processes – national reconciliation commission, national dialogue or national consultations – that member states deployed in the search for national reconciliation and the institutional and policy measures they developed for inclusion, representation, or sharing of power for achieving inclusive structures of government and fostering national cohesion.

Another and critical issue is how to muster decisive political leadership and the will to make difficult compromises as a means of building trust and achieving national reconciliation. As the challenges in South Sudan or Mali show, this more than anything else is the key ingredient for the success of initiatives for national reconciliation and rebuilding of cohesion.

The timing of the theme of this session is of particular importance as it coincides with commencement of the 2020 AU theme of the year focusing on Silencing the Guns in Africa as 2019 gets concluded in a few weeks' time. Within this context, tomorrow's session is expected to draw out the particular contribution of its thematic focus towards the making progress to meet the ambition of silencing the guns in Africa. In this respect and as part of the effort to silence the guns, an important consideration is the need to paying a more central attention to the inclusion and promotion of arrangements for national reconciliation, restoration of peace, security and rebuilding of national cohesion in peace processes for resolving existing conflicts or as part of the initiative for restoring peace, security and rebuilding cohesion in emerging crisis situations such as in Cameroon or contested political transitions such as Ethiopia.

Indeed, national reconciliation and rebuilding of cohesion are crucial at all stages of the conflict cycle from prevention to post-conflict reconstruction and development. Such initiatives are important for countries having peace processes for resolving existing conflicts such as the Central African Republic or South Sudan or Mali and for countries in a post-conflict phase such as Cote d'Ivoire. Initiatives for national reconciliation and rebuilding of cohesion are also important for conflict prevention in countries with relative peace and stability. This is illustrated for example by recent experiences of some AU member states such as the Building of Bridges Initiative of Kenya and the provision, as part of the on-going transition facing contestations, for a national reconciliation commission in Ethiopia.

In all these different settings, some of the issues for the PSC and its member states include the role to be played by the AU and how to support initiatives for national reconciliation, restoration of peace, security and rebuilding of cohesion. The AU, including through the PSC, has on various occasions called for the ratification of various AU instruments. There are however gaps on how to give them domestic legislative, institutional and policy expression and translate them into forms of inclusive and representative political and socio-economic governance structures.

This is not the first time that the PSC convenes a session on subject related to the theme of tomorrow's session. Its 347th, 383rd, 409th, 525th, 672nd and 726th sessions also focused on a related theme. Indeed, the first time the PSC held ministerial level session on a related theme was at its 393rd session. That session was held in Algiers, Algeria, on 29 June 2013 under the theme 'National Reconciliation: A Crucial Factor for Security, Stability and Development in Africa'. Apart from highlighting what it

called elements for conducting national reconciliation, the communique of this 383rd ministerial session underscored that 'national reconciliation is an imperative for overcoming divisions arising from conflict and restoring social cohesion, in order to ensure lasting stability and progress'.

The communique of the 409th session of the PSC recommended to the AU Assembly to declare '2014-2024 as a decade of reconciliation in Africa with a view to consolidating peace, stability and sustainable development on the continent', leading to the AU Assembly decision of 31 January 2014 declaring '2014–2024 as the Madiba Nelson Mandela Decade of Reconciliation in Africa'. Although it has not been implemented, one of the important pronouncements of the 525th press statement of the PSC was the decision to make the theme a standing thematic agenda of the PSC to be reflected in the annual indicative calendar.

The Press Statement of the last PSC session on this theme at the 726th session of the PSC emphasized the importance of comprehensive transitional justice and reconciliation process, as being key to effectively preventing relapses and laying a strong foundation for sustainable peace in countries emerging from violent conflicts. Affirming the critical importance of national ownership, it also underscored 'the importance of building and further enhancing the capacity of local, national and regional justice systems, including peace committees, peacebuilding ministries and national reconciliation commissions, as well as community and traditional justice systems.' It also reiterated previous calls for expediting the process of the development and adoption of AU transitional justice policy instrument.

The review of the previous sessions highlights that at least two elements were lacking. First, although these

previous sessions benefited from the 2006 AU Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, when these previous sessions were held the AU transitional justice policy did not exist. Second, the mechanism for following up the measures required to advance this thematic agenda. Tomorrow's session takes place in a different context. First, it is convened after the adoption of the AU Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), which was adopted by the AU Assembly in February 2019. Apart from consolidating the key messages of previous PSC sessions on this theme and bringing them into a coherent framework, this Policy presents, drawing from the rich and diverse national reconciliation, justice and peace-making experiences of the continent, the principles, guidelines, mechanisms and benchmarks for the implementation of national transitional justice processes including national reconciliation and truth seeking. For its implementation, the AUTJP is complemented, as highlighted in the preface to the policy that AU Chairperson Mousa Faki Mahamat wrote, by the Study of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on Transitional Justice and Human and Peoples' Rights.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. It is expected that the PSC would underscore national reconciliation, restoration of peace, security and rebuilding of national cohesion to be indispensable for achieving progress in Africa's quest for Silencing the Guns and should receive particular attention during the 2020 theme of the year. The PSC is also expected to call for the implementation of previous decisions on the theme particularly the decision of its 525th for making the theme of the session a standing agenda item of the PSC. The PSC could also welcome the adoption by the AU Assembly of the AUTJP and urge member states to use the Policy in pursuing national reconciliation, restoration of peace, security and rebuilding of cohesion. The PSC could also call on

the AU Commission and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in collaboration with member states to support the implementation of the AUTJP in peace processes, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and national reconciliation initiatives and report to it on existing and emerging national initiatives.