

PSC field visits and follow up on their outcomes

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Tomorrow (12 June) the Peace and Security Council (PSC) will have a session focusing on PSC field missions and the follow up to the outcome of the field missions. The PSC Secretariat is expected to provide inputs. During the past two months the PSC undertook field missions to Sudan, Darfur and South Sudan.

Field visit has become part of the working methods of the PSC with the adoption of the Conclusions of the Yaoundé Retreat of the PSC held on 15-16 November 2012. The Conclusions provided that members agreed to 'the need to undertake field missions, especially to the conflict areas'. The following year the PSC undertook field visits to a number of major conflict zones, notably Darfur in Sudan, Goma in the eastern DRC, Mogadishu in Somalia and Abyei in South Sudan, making the visits in 2013 the highest number of visits undertaken by the PSC in one calendar year.

The PSC field visits serve a wide range of purposes in terms of the effective implementation of the PSC Protocol. They provide PSC members first hand insights on the conflict parties, the nature of the conflict and indeed the security and humanitarian impact of particular conflicts. Such insights would help PSC members to have a more effective participation in the policy deliberations of the PSC on the specific conflict situations. Field visits can also play a role of supporting ongoing efforts for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts including mediation and peace-making efforts as well as peace support operations. In an ongoing conflict, field visits, if implemented effectively and are accompanied by follow up action, which can help in reducing violence.

Despite the fact that the field visits have become part of the PSC working methods, the details that could guide field visits are not elaborated in any of the subsequent retreats of the PSC. As a result, the role of field visits, the choice and timing of the places for field visits, the drafting and consideration of the reports including their publication and the mechanism for their follow up are yet to be properly clarified.

The current practice shows that PSC field visits are organized based on specific terms of reference. Often, the PSC Chair of the Month decides on the choice and inclusion of field visit in the monthly program of work of the PSC. For the field missions undertaken in the past two months, the visits were undertaken at a time different from the periods proposed in the program of the month.

In terms of best practice, the PSC Secretariat has started issuing statements on the field visits. When the PSC commenced its field visit to South Sudan, the AU issued a press statement outlining the purpose of the visit, how it relates to ongoing efforts for resolution of the conflict and the places that the PSC would travel to during its field visit in South Sudan. Even more interesting is the fact that the PSC Secretariat issued press release on PSC's field visit to Sudan two times. The first time was on 7 May 2018 after its arrival and commencement of the field visit. Apart from providing the itinerary of the PSC, it highlighted the various stakeholders the PSC plans to interact with. As the press statement for the field visit to South Sudan, this one also indicated the significance of the timing of the field visit.

It can also be gathered from these recent visits that timing of visits is generally tied with significant developments relating to the conflict situation. While the visit to South Sudan comes at a time when the sub-regional body the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been trying to have the peace process back on track with its High-Level

Revitalization Process, the visit to Sudan is linked to the ongoing process on the review and downsizing of the UN-AU Hybrid Mission to Darfur (UNAMID).

Another good practice is the preparation of the field visits report and its presentation to and consideration by the PSC. This is very critical. The report helps not only in documenting the information gathered during the field visit but also in informing the follow up to the field visits.

Currently, the PSC field visit reports are not made public. This is in part a result of the lack of detailed guideline on the PSC field visits including the status of the field visit reports. Importantly however there is ongoing debate in the PSC on whether the report should include everything that the PSC gathered during its interactions with various stakeholders. There are members of the PSC who do not seem comfortable with the inclusion of certain details owing to the fact that they ring too intrusive and may undermine the sovereignty of the country concerned.

Apart from the foregoing issues on clarifying the mechanics of the organization and outcome of PSC field visits, in tomorrow's session the PSC would also reflect on the outcome of its field visits. In this respect issues for consideration include timeline for finalizing the PSC decisions and follow up on the implementation of the decisions. Given the importance of field visits and the expanding richness of the PSC practice on field visits, the outcome of tomorrow's session may include the formulation of the relevant practices into PSC working methods as guidelines on the conduct and outcome of PSC field visits.