

# PSC session to discuss the implementation of AU Assembly Decisions

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Tomorrow (21 April) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold a discussion on the implementation of the decisions of the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU relating to peace and security. Although it was initially envisaged to take place via VTC, it is now expected to be conducted on the basis of email exchanges and the silence procedure.

It is to be recalled that the 33rd AU summit held in February 2020, has made a number of decisions related to peace and security after deliberating on the report of the PSC, the outcome of the 12th Ordinary Meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security (STCDSS) and the report on the implementation of AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns. Moreover, the AU Assembly has also adopted specific decisions on Libya and the Sahel following a PSC summit level meeting that was held at the margins of the summit.

It is envisaged that the PSC will be guided for the purposes of this session by the Matrix of the Summit Decisions which summarize the various outcomes that require follow up by the PSC, member states and relevant AU Commission departments. However, given the major changes since the February Summit due to COVID19 and measures taken to mitigate the spread, the discussion is expected to prioritize from the decisions that require follow up during this period and for which alternative options of implementation is feasible.

The Assembly made decisions in relation to crises situations

as well as thematic issues. In the context of the African Standby Force (ASF), the Assembly has tasked the PSC to consider the establishment of a Special Unit within the ASF that serves to combat terrorism and to present its conclusions at the Ordinary Session in February 2021. Although Egypt has proposed to host an Extraordinary Summit dedicated to this matter, this may be reconsidered given the current restrictions on physical meeting and to identify an alternative means to follow up on this.

The other thematic issue featured in the Assembly is on efforts towards child protection. The Assembly has requested the AU Commission to integrate child protection into Silencing the Guns campaign and the 2020 theme of the AU, as well as to develop a comprehensive policy on child protection in AU peace support operations. The Assembly further reiterated previous decision, which has also been echoed by the PSC, on the appointment of a special envoy for children in armed conflict.

Issues related to terrorism and violent extremism formed a major peace and security agenda of the 33rd AU summit. In this context, the Assembly decided to organize an Extraordinary Summit focusing on the challenges of terrorism and violent extremism to galvanize support and immediate action to assist countries, which are facing the severe effects of terrorism. To this end the Assembly tasked the AU Commission, in coordination with the Chairperson of the Union, to undertake preparation for the convening of the Summit.

Although this was meant to take place in May 2020, given the current context the PSC may reflect on other mechanisms to pursue the agenda. One possible option is to have a VTC heads of state and government level PSC session on the theme followed by a similar remote summit level meeting of the Bureau of the AU Assembly.

The second set of decisions adopted by the Assembly emanate from the 12th STCDSS which mainly looked at three major issues

that may need further follow up by the PSC. The first decision is on the extension of the implementation timeline of the African Union Master Roadmap (AUMR) on Silencing the Guns beyond December 2020 to provide more time for member states and other stakeholders to implement objectives set in the roadmap. More particularly, the Assembly called on for more strengthened implementation and reporting on the economic, social, environmental and legal aspects of the master roadmap. In this respect Kenya as a country that offered to host a meeting on the review of the implementation of the AUMR may provide further input on the matter.

The current situation of COVID19 and the restrictions on physical meetings will have direct impact on the implementation of AUMR, which is ending in December 2020. Many of the activities, which are time bound and planned to take place this year in line with the 2020 theme are expected to be postponed. The PSC may however undertake preparation to produce the comprehensive Report on the Status of the Implementation of the AUMR, which the Assembly has requested the Council to submit at the January/February 2021 Summit. The second agenda item considered at the STCDSS is on the AU Doctrine on Peace Support Operations (PSO).

The Assembly has requested the AUC to gather further inputs on the doctrine to be presented at the upcoming STCDSS in 2020. Although it remains uncertain whether such meeting would be possible, the PSC may request member states and RECs/RMs to send their input on the doctrine to the AU Commission.

The third decision is around Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The Assembly has given the responsibility to the AU Commission to conduct a second phase of the Mapping Study on SALW focusing more on illicit weapons flows more particularly linked to terrorist activities. Furthermore, it has requested the PSC to work closely with the UN Security Council to address the challenges around the proliferation and flow of SALW and violation of arms embargos. As a major driver of

conflict in the Sahel and Libya, among others, this deserves a robust and sustained engagement and follow up both at the level of the PSC and the AU Commission.

Another major area, which the PSC may deliberate on in tomorrow's session, is around early warning and conflict prevention. The Assembly has requested the PSC in collaboration with other AU Organs and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanism (RMs) Policy Organs, to establish a format to engage on strengthening efforts on early warning and early response issues. Hence the Assembly has requested the PSC and the RECs/RMs to initiate the process at the upcoming annual Consultative Meeting on Peace and Security in May 2020. In the light of the potential of COVID19 and the response measures to have dire peace and security consequences on the continent, a focus on early warning and response has acquired heightened importance.

The Assembly has also made a reference to a PSC decision on the authorization the immediate deployment of an AU Mission Against Ebola in DRC (MAEC). The PSC may follow up on the fate of this mission taking in consideration and assessing the ongoing developments of COVID19 and the capacity of the AU as well as the recent reports of a resurgence of the Ebola outbreak in the DRC.

Two regions received a particular attention by the PSC during the 33rd ordinary session: the Sahel region and Libya. The most notable aspect of the deliberation on the Sahel is expected to be the initiative for deploying 3000 AU troops to the Sahel region in support of the efforts of the countries in the region. It is to be recalled that the AUC has taken steps towards mobilizing support towards the deployment of these troops however this also requires the prompt direction by the PSC on the nature and scope of the mandate as well as its coordination with existing peace support operations.

On Libya, three major decisions are expected to feature in the

Matrix. One is in relation to dispatching a joint AU-UN military and security reconnaissance mission to Libya. Although due to the current freezing of activities this particular process may not be conducted, this period however offers the PSC to review and make the necessary adjustment to this plan. The second point, which was raised in the decision, is around the establishment of Libya contact group. The contact group, which held its first meeting in March under the leadership of the Chair of the AU High Level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya, is a key platform to consolidate AU's role in the Libyan peace process.

The third concerns the elevation to the level of mission of the current AU Liaison Office in Libya, and to equip it with the necessary political, diplomatic and military capacity, with a view to ensuring greater contribution and participation of the AU in the efforts aimed at finding a lasting solution to the crisis in Libya. The AU has strongly urged for its active role in finding a sustainable peace in Libya. While AU's push for such role has as yet to win support in the UN Security Council, the elevation of its office together with the contact group could strengthen its influence in the Libya peace process.

The outcome of the session was unknown during the production of this 'Insight'. Given major changes that have taken place since the 33rd Ordinary Session, particularly in relation to developments of COVID19 the PSC may prioritize decisions and activities that may be implemented within the set limits on meetings and travel. The PSC may task the AU Commission to present proposals on adjustments to and modalities for follow up of the decisions in the context of COVID19. In relation to both the Sahel region and Libya the PSC may express concern over the ongoing fighting in the midst of COVID19. The Council may exert further political pressure on belligerent parties to adhere to the global call on cessation of hostilities. In terms of early warning and response, which has become more

pressing in the context of COVID19 and pending the possibility of convening a meeting on this subject with AU organs and RECs/RMs, the PSC may urge the AU Commission working with RECs/RMs to initiate assessment of risks for peace and security with a view to help member states facing major risks of instability and violence due to COVID19 initiate mitigating measures for preventing conflicts. It could also request that AU regional and liaison offices, PSC authorized or mandated missions expand their focus to cover the peace and security impacts of COVID19, while ensuring the safety and security of their personnel.