

Sensitisation Session on International Disarmament

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Tomorrow (4 April) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold a sensitization session on International Disarmament with a focus on the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (Ottawa Treaty) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The concept note of this 837th meeting envisages that tomorrow's session will be an open one.

Executive Secretary of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE) and the Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Beatrice Fihn are expected to brief the Council. The Commissioner of Peace and Security and the Defense and Security Division (DSD) will also deliver a statement. Additionally, statements are also expected from invited participants including Norway as the President of the Mine Ban Treaty for 2019 and host of the fourth review conference of the treaty. A statement will also be delivered by the Chair of the month, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye of Nigeria.

The session aims at generating awareness and reinvigorating commitment for the implementation of the two instruments. The Ottawa Treaty came into force in March 1999 with the central objective of eliminating anti-personnel land mines (AP-mines) globally. Currently 51 African member states have ratified the treaty. The review of the Treaty has taken place every five years, the last one was held in 2014 in Maputo, which also marked the 15th anniversary of the entry into force of the treaty. Consequently the Maputo Action Plan (2014-2019) was adopted with clear commitments on the implementation of time-bound obligation of the destruction of all stockpiled anti-

personnel mines by the year 2025. The fourth review conference is scheduled for November 2019 in Oslo, which will mark the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Convention.

The concept note of the session indicates that despite the commitments of African member states both at the global and regional levels and the progress that has been made over the years, 13 AU Member States remain affected by mines, while 4 have not completed the destruction of their stockpiles. The anti-personnel land mines continue to kill and injure people even after cessation of hostilities by warring parties. Member states are continuously facing challenges due to armed groups increased use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) compounded with Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) threat particularly in Peace Support Operations context.

Although there has not been regular PSC briefing on AP-mines, at the AUC level the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action has been observed in past on 4 April. Moreover, previously the AU developed and launched the Mine Action and Explosive Remnants of War Strategic Framework project document for the period 2014-2017. The session may serve as a reminder of existing initiatives, which require renewed commitments and to commemorate the International Day.

The other instrument that will be discussed extensively is the TPNW and its implementation in line with the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty (the Treaty of Pelindaba). The TPNW was adopted in July 2017 by 122 UN Member States, including 42 African countries, as a global instrument banning nuclear weapons. Despite such efforts, currently a total of 50 ratifications are needed to bring the treaty into force and only 22 countries have ratified including two African countries. Thus far, there are 70 signatories and 22 ratifications of the TPNW.

From Africa, while 20 AU member states are signatories, only South Africa and The Gambia have ratified this treaty.

Botswana, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Sudan and Tanzania have expressed their intention to ratify the treaty. Given the leadership that African states demonstrated through the Pelindaba Treaty banning the proliferation of nuclear weapons with ratification from 41 AU member states, tomorrow's session may serve as an opportunity for AU member states to take Africa's commitment to the international level by mobilizing the ratification of the TPNW as a means of strengthening the international legal regime aiming at outlawing nuclear weapons.

This session that can help in the effort for strengthening multilateral regulation of nuclear weapons is very timely, taking place as the tension at the global level is heightened. With the withdrawal of the US and Russia from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, the lack of talks between the two countries for extending the 2010 treaty that reduced nuclear warheads, there are increasing fears of nuclear arms race, which threatens the TPNW. There are also risks in other fronts including around upholding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal due to the withdrawal of the US, the collapse of the talks between the US and North Korea and the recent escalation of tension between India and Pakistan are all concerns that the PSC members may raise as existential threats of global stability.

In the midst of these challenges Africa remains committed in maintaining a nuclear weapon free zone. The AU Chairperson and head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have signed a four-year agreement (2018-2022), an agreement on a safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies for development in Africa. At the 763rd PSC session held in April 2018, the Council 'reaffirmed its commitment to disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy, as enshrined in the AU Constitutive Act and the Protocol relating to the establishment of the PSC'. In the same decision the

Council 'requested the AU Commission and the AFCONE to provide annual briefing to the PSC on the status of the implementation of the Pelindaba Treaty and the activities of AFCONE'. The latter was established by the Pelindaba Treaty to monitor compliance of member states in the use of nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes and development.

As indicated in the concept note the session may also shed light on the fact although the continent is a nuclear weapon free zone, the global threats and use of nuclear weapons will have severe humanitarian impact on Africa and may reverse the development gains made. It may also make the case for the massive global expenditure on nuclear weapons amounting to close to US\$105 billion annually to be channeled for global development and cooperation. The discussions may also highlight the efforts of countries including Nigeria and South Africa, who facilitated the initial resolution that led to the establishment of the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and continue to engage in the implementation of the treaty.

The expected outcome is a press statement. Tomorrow's PSC meeting will hold a comprehensive discussion and deliberation given that it will be covering two interlinked instruments and processes that have immense impact globally and for the continent. The PSC may reiterate its commitment to nuclear weapons disarmament non-proliferation and cooperation in the peaceful application of nuclear science and technology. The Council may highlight the existential risks and humanitarian consequences of nuclear detonation would have on the continent. Hence, it may call on member states to ratify the TPNW to ensure that it enters into force. The PSC may also urge for the full implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the realization of the Maputo 2025 Commitment and for international partners to support the complete clearance of AP mines in Africa. The PSC may also call on the AU Commission to convene a meeting of AU member states for an African common position for the fourth review conference of

the Ottawa Treaty.