

# The status of the RCI-LRA and renewal of its mandate

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Tomorrow (16 May) the Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold a briefing session on the status of implementation of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) and the renewal of the mandate of the regional operation. The agenda for the session, which was added subsequent to the adoption of the program of the PSC for the month of May, envisaged submission of a report of the African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson to guide the deliberations and the Council's actions. Instead of the report, expected to be finalized after the meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCM) – the political management body of the RCI-LRA –, the PSC will receive a briefing on the status of implementation of the RCI-LRA.

Apart from the briefing that Smaïl Chergui, African Union (AU) Commissioner for Peace and Security, is expected to provide, the representatives of the RCI-LRA member countries, namely the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Uganda and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are expected to participate and make statements. The countries most affected by the LRA notably CAR and to some extent DRC are expected to call for the sustaining of the RTF operations. Others expected to make statements include representatives of the UN, the US and the European Union.

It is to be recalled that the US, which provided Special Forces and logistical support to the operations of the Regional Task Force (RTF), suspended its engagement in March 2017. Subsequently, Uganda, which has been the main contributor of the RTF announced withdrawal of its 2,000 troops from the CAR. The operation of the RTF headquarter in

the CAR has also been suspended, thereby limiting AU's engagement with the sectors which operate within their national territories.

Given the limited capacity and participation of the CAR in the anti-LRA operation and the lack of cross-border operation between CAR and DRC, there are concerns that the withdrawal of Ugandan forces would result in a security vacuum, which the LRA forces could use to regroup. While the details would only come from the AUC Chairperson's report, it is of interest for PSC members to know how the withdrawal of troops and US logistical support and freezing of the RTF headquarters is affecting on the anti-LRA operations and the mandate of the RCI-LRA. As the recent meeting of the Sector Commanders of the AU RTF held at the AU headquarters on 28-29 March highlighted, one issue of particular interest is the reactivation of the RTF with the re-establishment of the force headquarters. Yet, the required funding for the force headquarters has to be mobilized.

For PSC members, this session also presents an opportunity for receiving update on the implementation of the various follow up items from its last decision. This is particularly the case with respect to the realignment of the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) of the RTF with the new developments of the withdrawal of Ugandan troops and US Special Forces. The same is true of the PSC's call for the convening of a summit the RCI-LRA countries to provide guidance on the future configuration of the RCI-LRA.

In terms of the status of implementation of the RCI-LRA, the briefing is also expected to update PSC members on the level of threat that the LRA continues to pose and recent developments in terms of the counter-LRA operations. It would also provide highlights on the state of coordination with the UN, including within the framework of the joint convening of the Sector Commanders meeting in collaboration with the UN Regional Office in Central Africa.

With respect to renewal of the mandate of the RCI-LRA, it is anticipated that the PSC will be requested to renew the mandate of the mission for a short period, pending the finalization of the Chairperson's report that will follow the meeting of the JCM of the RCI-LRA. The usual one-year period of renewal of mandate is expected to take place on the basis of the details that the Chairperson's report would provide on the plan for the RCI-LRA operation and its mandate.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. Apart from welcoming the efforts to sustain the counter LRA operation, the PSC is expected to call for mobilization of logistical and other support to the RTF contingents and to design and implement projects for the stabilization and rehabilitation of the LRA affected areas. Expressing its expectation for receiving the report of the AUC Chairperson, the PSC is also expected to renew the mandate of the RCI-RTF for a short period of three months.