

Open Session: Celebration of Amnesty Month

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Tomorrow (5 September) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold an open session to commemorate the celebration of amnesty month. The discussion is expected to focus on the progress made on the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap on silencing the guns by 2020 mainly the challenges and perspectives, with a focus on the Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Africa.

The Department of Peace and Security (PSD), particularly the representative of the Director of PSD and Acting Head of the Division on Defence and Security are expected to deliver briefing to the PSC. Also expected to make a statement is the Head of the UN Office to the AU. The Institute for Security Studies is expected to present as well.

Tomorrow's session is taking place in line with the 2017 Assembly decision Assembly/AU/Dec. 645(XXIX), which after deliberating on the Inaugural Report of the PSC on the Implementation of the AU Master Roadmap on Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020, declared the month of September each year, up to 2020, as "Africa Amnesty Month" for the surrender and collection of illegally owned weapons/arms.

It is expected that tomorrow's session will address three inter-related thematic issues. The first relates to Security Sector Reform/Governance (SSR/G). The tailored approach, account should be had to the second is the commemoration of the Amnesty Month. The last is the implementation of the AU Roadmap on Silencing the Guns by 2020.

In the presentation from the Head of the Defence and Security

Division. particular attention is expected to be given to SSR including the AU SSR program and the AU SSR Policy framework. Tomorrows' session follows the inauguration meeting of the AU steering committee on security sector reform, held from 3 September 2019 in Addis Ababa.

The Silencing the Guns Roadmap recognizes the challenges around SSR policies. The Roadmap calls on the need to promote ownership of national SSR Programs in member states and the need to stipulate clear obligations and timelines on SSR in peace agreement including putting in place adequate follow up mechanisms.

For PSC members it would be of interest to identify the challenges relating to SSR in Africa. One set of issues expected to be highlighted is the sensitivities of member states and wrong perceptions that SSR concerns only post-conflict situations. Studies also show that another challenge in SSR relate to civilian possession and use of small arms and weapons. The recent report by the AUC and Small Arms Survey 'Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa' has noted that civilian actors including individuals, private businesses and non- state armed groups hold almost 80% of small arms on the continent. Among the civilian held firearms only around 10% has been registered.

This is also an indication that security regimes in various African countries have been characterised by a range of non-state actors, including private security companies, local militias, guerrilla armies, community self-policing groups and others. With the lack or weakening monopoly use of force by the state particularly in countries affected by violence leads to the emergence of reliance by individuals and communities on self-organized security provision.

While a locally driven SSR is key in designing a tailored approach, account should be had to the transnational nature of insecurities. This also requires enhanced coordination among

the security institutions of neighbouring countries including through the Regional Economic Communities/Mechanisms and the AU SSR processes.

Tomorrow's session may also highlight that SSR is not solely a security matter and may call on for a comprehensive approach to reform encompassing state-society relationship. Therefore, its effective implementation may require the concerted efforts and cooperation among wide range of institutions in the government structure and the public at large.

There is also the challenge of effective formulation and proper implementation of SSR provisions in peace agreements. As the experiences of South Sudan and the Central African Republic show, this is one of the major sources of disruption of peace processes. In the light of the return of countries to conflict after signing of peace agreements, there is also interest in post-conflict reconstruction and development. Hence the PSC and participants may reflect on how to sustain peace including through enhanced consideration of the SSR dimension of peace and post-conflict processes.

In terms of the amnesty month, the recent report on small arms and light weapons referred to above highlighted the need for focusing on private possession and use of small arms and light weapons. In this regard the 860th meeting of the PSC stressed 'the need for improved measures to regulate non-state actor possession of a small arms and light weapons, in order to prevent the diversion or misuse of weapons and encourages Member States to implement initiatives that are in line with the Africa Amnesty Month'.

However, there is a need for national level measures including the boosting of state-based provision of security services for encouraging the surrender of weapons in the hands of non-state actors and reporting on how and whether member states are observing the Amnesty month. Central to this is the need for finding ways of establishing or restoring the capacity

particularly of states lacking effective provision of security to all their populations. This is directly linked to security sector governance as a measure of conflict prevention.

With respect to the AU Roadmap on Silencing the Guns, tomorrow's session affords an opportunity for taking stock of where implementation of the Roadmap stands and the progress made towards achieving its ambitious objectives. Also important is the lessons to be learned from the process of elaboration and implementation of the Roadmap, including in terms of identification of areas of intervention and effective implementation of relevant measures. With 2020 only months away, it would be of particular interest to PSC members to discuss what will happen post-2020.

The expected outcome of the session is a press statement. The Council may highlight that the prospects for sustainable peace and stability are ensured by the extent to which SSR is anchored on the state of security broadly defined, instead of a narrow focus on certain security institutions. The PSC may reiterate its previous decisions for Member States and RECs/Regional Mechanisms to submit reports to Council, through the AUC, on the actions taken in implementing the Africa Amnesty Month, to feed in its report to the upcoming Assembly. With respect to the Roadmap on Silencing the Guns by 2020, the PSC could request the AU Commission to provide it with a comprehensive report reviewing implementation of the Roadmap and proposing on how the agenda on silencing the guns by 2020 will be followed up post-2020