

# Open Session on Hate Crimes and Fighting Genocide Ideology in Africa

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Tomorrow (12 April) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 989th session, which will be a virtual open session on the theme 'hate crimes and fighting genocide ideology in Africa'. The session is to be convened in line with the Communiqué of the 678th session of the PSC that decided to convene annually in April an open meeting on hate crimes and fighting genocide ideology in Africa.

The PSC Chairperson for the month Permanent Representative of the Republic of Djibouti, Mohammed Idriss, is expected to deliver opening remarks followed by a statement from the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye. Presentations will also be delivered by the Representative of the Republic of Rwanda, Mr. Tom Ndahiro, Researcher and Scholar on Genocide; UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu; and Head of the European Union (EU) Delegation to the AU Birgitte Markussen. The Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) are also expected to make statements.

Tomorrow's session forms part of the annual commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which was observed on 7 April in accordance with AU Assembly Decision Assembly/ AU / Dec.695 of 2 July 2018. The PSC designated the theme of the session for remembering both the lives lost and the destruction caused in Rwanda and the lessons learned from the genocide. As highlighted in previous sessions, this theme also serves to draw attention to contemporary issues of ethnic, religious and other identity-based mobilisation of

animosity and hatred as well as incitement of violence.

Recent peace and security trends on the continent show that the rise of violent extremism in Africa has come to pose increasingly serious concerns for peace, security and stability in the continent. The increase in violent extremism in Africa, particularly along religious and ethnic lines, lays a fertile ground for eventual occurrence of hate crimes and genocide. Other related areas of concern include the rise of hate speech, inter-ethnic and communal clashes and sectarian or tribal violence. Hate crimes and genocide are known to occur, not as isolated event, but rather as a result of intensified hatred and violent incitement which develop and strengthen over a period of time. Hence, Council may stress the importance of ensuring concerted efforts at the national, regional and continental level, to fight extremist ideologies. In connection to that, Council may underscore the need of addressing the underlying causes of extremism such as marginalization, tribalism and discrimination, all of which also create the environment for genocide and hate crimes to thrive.

In diverse and heterogeneous communities that are divided along ethnic, religious, racial and other grounds, and in those societies consisting of minority groups, a major policy issue entails measures that would prevent discrimination, exclusion, and ensuing hate speech which eventually leads to hate crimes and risk of genocide. It is also as important to create a true sense of unity based on inclusive approaches that promote tolerance of differences and embrace ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission which was established in March 1999 in Rwanda, with the purpose of promoting unity among Rwandans following the genocide against Tutsi, stands as a good example of an inclusive approach which advances unity. Council is expected to commend the creation of this Commission and call on other Member States to emulate this and similar initiatives

in their efforts to build social cohesion.

As the PSC repeatedly highlighted at its previous sessions on the theme, combating impunity of genocide perpetrators is an essential part of seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth and reconciliation. This requires the promulgation and enactment of the necessary legal framework dealing with hate speech, hate crimes and genocide, as well as strengthened cooperation and coordination among Member States to prosecute or extradite suspected fugitives.

Just as important is fighting against genocide denialism which deprives healing and justice to victims/survivors, and prevents a successful process of reconciliation from taking place. Accordingly, Council may urge Member States to sign, ratify, domesticate and implement relevant international legal instruments on hate crimes and genocide, as well as ensure proper prosecution of perpetrators of such atrocious crimes in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In addition, Council may call on Member States to take lesson from Rwanda's experience of using various mechanisms such as deportations, prosecutions and commissions of inquiry in its fight against impunity and its quest of justice for victims of the 1994 genocide against Tutsis.

The last time PSC had a session on the same theme was in 2019, at its 836th meeting. Among the key points emphasised at that session was Council's call for Member States and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) to effectively utilise AU early warning mechanisms, in order to assess, detect and respond to risks of hate crimes and genocide in a timely manner. Tomorrow's session offers Council the chance to reiterate its call and follow up on measures taken by States and RECs/RMs, to avert possible risks of hate crimes and genocide. In addition, Council may also reiterate the importance of raising awareness about the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, through formal education in

schools and through media, so as to sensitise the current generation and prevent similar atrocities from happening again.

The vital role of youth and women in peace process has been emphasised by Council at its various sessions dedicated to the themes 'youth, peace and security' and 'women, peace and security'. Grassroots level inclusive initiatives that ensure meaningful participation of women and youth in countering rhetoric of hate and pursuing peace and unity can considerably contribute to preventing hate crimes and genocide. It is particularly important to ensure that the youth play a direct role in social transformation, in order to ensure the sustainability of peace. Hence, Council may call on Member States to adopt inclusive programmes and platforms that fully engage women and youth.

The impact of new communication technology and social media is another area of interest, particularly in terms of their role in the propagation of fake news, hate speech and incitement of violence and the impact thereof. There is increasing concern that new communication technology and social media platforms have also proven to negatively impact peace and security, mainly by serving as a platform for incitement of violence and exacerbation of hate speech, including for mobilizing and recruitment by terrorist groups. The key issue that arises here is the ways and means of harnessing the enormous benefits of the new communication technology and social media platforms in enhancing human rights and democratization while limiting their negative impacts on social harmony and peace and stability. It is also as essential to manipulate the media to counter extremist rhetoric and inform and educate the community of the dangers of hate speech. Council may reflect on the importance of responsible use of social media and the need for proper State regulation of the media space in line with international human rights principles.

The expected outcome of the session, if previous sessions are

any guide, is expected to be a press statement. As indicated in the information note of the session, Council is expected to request the AU Commission (AUC) to appoint an officer within the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) to drive a campaign aimed at fighting the ideology of hate, hate crimes and genocide, through print and electronic media. Council is also expected to request the CEWS to setup a mechanism for regular assessment of potential genocide, in order to alert the PSC and AU Member States. In addition, the CEWS may also be requested to brief Council twice a year, on key developments in the continent, in order to allow timely intervention. Having regard to the importance of the theme, Council is also expected to request the AUC to include in PSC's 'Report on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa', a section on indicators of hate crimes and risk factors for their escalation into genocide.