

Open Session on Humanitarian Action in Africa

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Tomorrow (18 May), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to convene its 1155th meeting which will be committed to its annual open session on humanitarian action in Africa.

Following opening remarks by Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uganda and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of May, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to make a statement. Representative of the AU Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Development may deliver a statement. Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are also expected to participate in the session.

Being convened within the framework of the decision of PSC's 469th press statement to dedicate an annual session to humanitarian action in Africa, tomorrow's meeting is expected to offer updates on the humanitarian situation in the continent, with a specific focus on the issue of food insecurity and prospects to enhance Africa's self-reliance in food production. Having regard to the growing prevalence of the issue, it is to be recalled that the PSC committed its 1083rd session to 'food security and conflict in Africa'. In the Communiqué of that session, the impact of conflicts on food production and the role they play in the disruption of agricultural yields and value chains was emphasised. The coming session serves to highlight the continuing increase in food insecurity in the continent and opportunities for Africa

to enhance agricultural production to promote food security.

Driven by multiple man-made and natural causes, the current food security crisis experienced across the various regions and countries in Africa has reached unprecedented levels over the past couple of years. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact, the war in Ukraine and resulting disruption to food and energy supply chains as well as cropping seasons characterised by poor rains and even drought in some regions, compounded by ongoing conflicts and unstable security settings, have resulted in acute food insecurity in many parts of the continent. According to the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), a total of 20.2 percent of the African population was facing hunger in 2021 alone. Last year, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing war and the geostrategic confrontation it triggered, African countries that depend on Russia and Ukraine for at least half percentage of their cereal import experienced over 70 percent raise in cereal prices. Not only has this put a major strain on the availability of and access to basic food items, it has also elevated hunger levels as the portion of population that cannot cope with the rise in food prices increased.

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the food and energy crisis that the Russian invasion and the ensuing geopolitical confrontation triggered have underscored the imperative for Africa to sever its dependence on global supply chains for its food. The corollary to this imperative is the need for Africa to harness its enormous agricultural potential for achieving food security. Additionally, AU member states need to use this crisis for leveraging the African Common Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for enhancing intra-Africa trade in agricultural products by prioritizing and fast tracking the processes for trading in agricultural products.

The East and Horn of Africa constitutes one of the regions, not only in Africa but also globally, most affected by food

insecurity. As of December 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated 37 million people in the region to be faced with acute food insecurity. Aside from being faced with the worst droughts experienced in decades, the region is home to some of the worst conflict situations in the continent. The devastating combined effect of insecurity, drought and other impacts of climate change such as floods have led to the displacement of over 13 million people in the east and horn region, as of June last year. South Sudan, which faces severe challenges in agricultural production due to the highest level of flooding the country has gone through in over 60 years, has 8.3 million people who face critical level of food insecurity as well as famine reported in multiple areas of the country. In Ethiopia, where over 22 million people are reportedly facing severe food shortages, over 8 million people are affected by prolonged drought experienced in the country's south and south-east parts while the conflict in Tigray and affected neighbouring regions has left 83 percent of the population food insecure. In Somalia, 6.5 million people are reportedly facing acute food insecurity due to multiyear drought that the country continues to suffer from. Despite earlier predictions of improved cereal production in Sudan due to projected favourable weather conditions, the situation in the country is not looking good either, due to the difficult economic conditions and the political instability, which are now compounded by the outbreak of the raging war.

West Africa and the Sahel are faring no better than the east and horn region. Estimates indicate that over 18 million people in the Sahel region experience severe food insecurity. Nigeria hosts 13 million people living under grave level of acute food insecurity. A significant amount of these are located in Boko Haram affected regions. Erratic rainy season, insecurity and rise in food price with reduced supply of food items leaves 1.2 million people in Mali requiring urgent food assistance. Substantial portion of these people are populations displaced due to terrorism related conflict and

intercommunal violence. Burkina Faso which now hosts the highest number of IDPs in the Sahel region – 1.9 million Burkinabe citizens displaced internally – is projected to have 3.5 million people facing acute food insecurity in the coming agricultural season of 2023.

In CAR, reduced access to basic materials required for agricultural production has been a principal factor behind the increase in the price of local foodstuff while the cost of imported goods has gone even higher due to rise in fuel and transportation prices. In the coming months of 2023, estimates point that about 3 million people are likely to be in crisis and emergency phases of food insecurity, particularly in violence affected and displaced community hosting regions. One of the world's largest hunger crisis currently, DRC is home to 26.4 million food insecure people, a number topping the total for some of the entire sub-regions of the continent. As the current conflict in the eastern part of the country fuels the growing displacement rate, factors related to climatic shocks and poor agricultural yields drive the increasing degree of food insecurity.

Although to a much lesser extent, countries in the north and southern Africa regions have also felt the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war. In countries like Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia inflation rates have gone up considerable percentages leading to increase in food prices while people's purchasing power decreases. In the southern Africa region, in addition to the spike in cost-of-living, Malawi and Zimbabwe are susceptible to raising degrees of food crisis due to likelihood of droughts and cyclones while violent conflict is the main driver of food insecurity in Mozambique.

Although all of these data project a grim image, it also offers the opportunity to re-examine Africa's approach in responding to food insecurity, in order to identify gaps and find solutions. In this respect, one important aspect the PSC

may reflect on is the significance of responding to Africa's food security crisis in a comprehensive manner that takes account of humanitarian, developmental and peace and security factors into consideration. While partnerships for humanitarian aid are pertinent and in fact indispensable to respond to immediate needs of affected populations, it is essential to ensure sustainability of humanitarian assistance, specifically by linking such efforts with development programmes that aim to boost food production at the national level. This opens up the potential for local communities to be assisted in a manner that would not only enable their eventual self-reliance, but also their contribution to nation-wide food production.

Further to tailoring humanitarian assistance towards building durable and sustainable food production along with addressing urgent needs, it is also critical for African member states to make all the necessary efforts to 'build sustainable and resilient agri-food system to ensure food sovereignty' as articulated in the Declaration of the 15th Extraordinary AU Humanitarian Summit [[Ext/Assembly/AU/Decl.\(XV\)](#)]. In most of the highly affected African countries, absence of agricultural modernisation and weak institutional capacity to provide research supported farming practices are among the factors which facilitate food insecurity. This requires that AU member states invest more on the agricultural sector.

Having regard to the role conflict and political instability play in inflaming food insecurity, the imperative for practical steps for silencing the guns cannot be overemphasized. For this, the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), UN and others together with CSOs need to work on preventing new conflicts from erupting and in mobilizing all their efforts for resolving existing conflicts.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a Communiqué. Expressing grave concern over the increasing rate of food

insecurity faced in multiple parts of the continent, the PSC may recall the 'African Common Position to accelerate the implementation of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030', which articulates Africa's collective resolve to strengthen the resilience of its food systems with the aim to meet the goals of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It may urge member states, in close collaboration with the AU Commission, to strengthen efforts towards realising the Common African Position as well as the outcomes of the 15th Extraordinary AU Humanitarian Summit relating to 'food security and nutrition in humanitarian situations in Africa'. Noting AU's theme for the year 2023 'Acceleration of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Implementation', the PSC may underscore the importance of AfCFTA for boosting intra-African trade in agricultural products and creating affordable food supply chains that can offer alternatives to increasing price of imports from outside of Africa. In this regard, the PSC may call on the AfCFTA Secretariat and states parties to the AfCFTA to prioritize and fast-track the adoption and operationalisation of the necessary institutional and legal arrangements for intra-African trade in agricultural products. PSC may encourage member states to invest more on services and raw materials relevant for advancing agricultural production and the sourcing of agricultural products used for humanitarian assistance from within the continent. The PSC may reiterate the request of its 1083rd session for the AU Commission to 'undertake a study and propose to Member States recommendation on the strategies to boost food production in Africa'. It may further restate the need to 'strengthen the linkage between humanitarian assistance, development and peacebuilding, with a view to enhance greater cooperation and coordination between actors in humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding' to leverage the role of each for enhancing food security.