

Open session on the Commemoration of the International Day of Peace

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Tomorrow (21 September) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to convene its 1033rd session, which will be an open session dedicated to the commemoration of international day of peace. Council will receive briefing on the second edition of the Luanda biennale “pan-African forum for the culture of peace” at the session.

Following the opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Chad to the AU, Mahamat Ali Hassan, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a statement. It is also expected that Amira El Fadil, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development will be making remarks. Representatives of the Republic of Angola, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are also expected to make presentations. A statement is also expected to be delivered by Solomon Dersso Founding Director of Amani Africa. All AU member States and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) are envisaged to participate in the session.

A joint initiative of the AU, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Government of Angola, the Pan-African Biennale was held for the first time in September 2019, in Luanda, where it was agreed that the forum shall be convened every two years. The first edition of the forum served to highlight the importance of strategic

partnerships to scale up projects for sustainable peace in Africa, the value of disseminating good practices for the prevention and resolution of conflicts and the need to showcase cultural diversity in Africa and demonstrate the resilience of the people in the face of conflicts. Tomorrow's briefing is expected to elaborate the main contents of the second edition of the biennale which is planned to take place on 4 October, under the theme "Strengthening the Pan-African Movement for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence: Towards a Global Partnership".

As indicated in the concept note for the biennale, one of the thematic areas of focus expected to feature at the event is "the contribution of arts, culture and heritage to peace", in line with AU's theme for the year 2021. As emphasised by the PSC at its 995th meeting commemorating "International Day of Living Together in Peace", respect for history, heritage and religious and cultural diversity are fundamental for maintaining peace. Similarly, at its 928th session committed to the same theme, Council underscored the need to address the underlying root-causes of conflicts in the continent including "inequalities, exclusion, marginalization, as well as mismanagement of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity". As demonstrated in different crises throughout Africa, intolerance for religious and cultural diversity is among the main factors instigating and exacerbating conflicts and violence. In connection with that, tomorrow's briefing may address the growing concern over terrorism and violent extremism in the continent, which are largely the results of fundamentalism that is based on intolerance of diversity. Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogues therefore needs to be emphasised as a critical means of countering intolerance, a major underlying root-cause for conflicts as well as the increasing incidence of terrorism and extremism in Africa. AU's 2021 theme also presents the best opportunity to demonstrate through various arts, Africa's rich heritage as well as the diverse history, culture and religion of its

people as a way of promoting better appreciation and respect for varied identities, thereby strengthening the culture of peace.

In addition to intolerance of diversities, deeply entrenched inequalities also contribute immensely to the outbreak and exacerbation of violence and conflicts in Africa. Ethnic, religious and other minorities, indigenous people and other marginalised groups are particularly most impacted as a result of legal norms or State practices which result in unequal treatment among citizens. Exclusion of specific sects of society, principally women, from participation and decision-making in peace processes and other State affairs is also another adverse impact of inequality on nurturing sustainable peace and development. Most importantly, the dominance of power and consequently, access to wealth and resource resting in the hands of very few, while an overwhelming majority of the continent's population lives under poverty lines is a principal reason for the creation of social divides in Africa. This is further complicated by either perceived or manifest ethnic dimensions to such class divides which have in multiple cases led to the creation of interethnic and clan based tensions culminating in political crises and armed conflicts. Violation of civil and political rights, lack of good governance and corruption also form part of factors which contribute to the creation and furthering of socio-economic inequalities. Tomorrow's briefing may reflect on how governments, civil society and the people at large could better utilise existing AU norms and frameworks on equality, human rights and democracy, to effectively fight against socio-economic inequalities.

Another topic that may feature at tomorrow's briefing is the contribution and importance of Africa's youth for the sustainability of peace and stability on the continent. One of the thematic areas of focus at the upcoming biennale, youth engagement in peace processes throughout the phases of

conflict prevention, management and resolution is paramount to ensuring that peace efforts will have lasting impact. Also taking into account that Africa's youth constitutes almost 60% of the continent's population, it is important to take advantage of this and work towards building a generation that advances and champions peaceful settlement of disputes. It is also to be recalled that at its 933rd session on "Youth, Peace and Security", Council emphasised the importance of increasing youth involvement in peace and security efforts and recognising the youth as resourceful agents for peace and security as well as for socio-economic development, and particularly, their role in the realisation of the Silencing the Guns agenda. In light of that, Council highlighted the importance of ensuring full implementation of the various relevant instruments including the African Youth Charter, Aspiration number four of Agenda 2063, as well as the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security and its 10-year implementation plan. At tomorrow's session, Council may reiterate its request for the AU Commission to collaborate with the regional economic communities and regional mechanisms (RECs/RMs) towards the popularisation and implementation of the Continental Framework and its 10-year implementation plan.

The last theme which will be addressed at this year's Luanda biennale is the potential of Africa's maritime domain for fostering peace and development. The importance of Africa's blue economy for the continent's sustainable development and integration, and therefore the need to ensure its effective management was among the key concerns stressed by the PSC at its 834th session. At a more recent session convened on maritime security (Council's 1012th meeting), emphasis was given to the need for concerted efforts, particularly among littoral States, to address maritime insecurity and its root-causes, including through adoption of security and military measures. One of the more contemporary concerns around the African maritime sector is also the vulnerability and exposure of sea traders to cyber attack. Hence, in addition to the

traditional threats such as piracy and other crimes committed at sea, there is need for addressing cyber security concerns within the maritime domain, mainly through incorporating cyber security measures in instruments and frameworks dealing with Africa's maritime security. Tomorrow's briefing may capture the major challenges to Africa's effective utilisation of its maritime domain and reflect on the available normative standards for addressing these challenges.

The expected outcome of the session is a Press Statement. Council may underscore the importance of the Luanda biennale for strengthening African unity and solidarity and for fostering the culture of peace. In light of that, it may reiterate the call made by the AU Assembly in Assembly/AU/Dec.796(XXXIV), for all AU member States to support and participate in the 2nd Luanda Biennale. It may call on member States and all other relevant stakeholders to take all necessary measures against intolerance of diversities, including through formal and informal education and awareness creation. It may also urge member States to address existing inequalities in their societies and to work towards building social cohesion based on equal rights and opportunities. Council may encourage the meaningful participation of youth, women and other marginalised groups in peace processes, as well as the instrumentality of indigenous approaches to prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It may call on member States to ensure ratification and implementation of relevant instruments relating to maritime domain, including the Lomé Charter as well as Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) and its Action Plan.