

Open Session on the Commemoration of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

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Tomorrow (3 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold its 1109th session on the Commemoration of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This year's commemorative session is expected to be an in-person meeting.

Following opening remarks of the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Mohamed Arrouchi, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to deliver a statement. The PSC is also expected to receive a briefing from the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security Bineta Diop, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, and UN Women Special Representative to AUC and ECA Awa Ndiaye Seck. The Coordinator of the Moroccan Network of Women Mediators Frida Jaidi, the representatives from the European Union (EU) and the League of Arab States (LAS) are also expected to deliver statements.

The last time Council convened a session in commemoration of resolution 1325 was at its 1052nd meeting of 29 November 2021.

The session focused on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the WPS agenda and it served to draw attention to the 'disproportionate adverse socio-economic impact on women and girls resulting from the COVID-19 containment measures being implemented by Member States'.

Tomorrow's session marks the 22nd anniversary of the UN Security Council's landmark resolution 1325 (2000) on WPS and will have a specific focus on the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. The prevalent perpetration of conflict related sexual violence (CRSV) in the various conflict settings on the continent including the use of sexual violence as an instrument of war makes UNSCR 1325 particularly important. Indeed, in the session that will feature the work of Patten is expected to highlight the scale of this problem currently. According to the 2021 [United Nations Secretary-General report on CRSV](#), countries across Africa reported the highest number of CRSV cases worldwide. In Central African Republic (CAR) alone, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) verified cases of CRSV affecting 379 women and 327 girls, representing a doubling in the number of reported cases compared with the previous year 2020. The report also highlighted the pervasiveness of CRSV in the war in Northern Ethiopia. Similarly, in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) documented 1,016 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 544 women, 459 girls, 7 boys and 6 men.

Women and girls are also victims of acts of terrorism. Terrorist groups, deliberately target women through acts of sexual and gender-based violence – such as rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage – as a means of achieving tactical, strategic and ideological aims. Many terrorist groups encroach on women's human rights and impede their

socioeconomic development, including by restricting their movement. Women in Africa are also facing gender-specific difficulties when attempting to access justice and seeking remedies as victims of terrorism. The Lake Chad basin, in 2021, recorded the greatest ever number of individuals defected from Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups including abducted women and children. This particular case highlights the importance of socioeconomic reintegration support. In Mali and Burkina Faso, groups such as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islamwa al-Muslimin have exploited local grievances, thereby deepening cycles of violence, which include CRSV.

In some contexts, women disproportionately experience internal displacement as a result of terrorist threats, and lose access to livelihoods owing to terrorist attacks. Migrant and refugee women and girls in conflict-affected areas, particularly those held in detention facilities, continue to face heightened risks of sexual violence in Libya. Furthermore, across diverse contexts, women and girls suffer ongoing attacks and threats of sexual violence which also impede their livelihood activities. In CAR, women and girls engaged in agriculture, gathering firewood or returning home to retrieve essential items after displacement, were raped and in some cases abducted and held by armed groups.

Indeed, UNSC Resolution 1325 recognizes that conflict affects women differently and that addressing the needs, views and participation of women would provide a positive peace dividend. It emphasizes the protection of women, their meaningful participation in peace and security processes, and the need for an increased role of women in preventing and resolving conflict. To date, Resolution 1325 was followed by nine other resolutions namely 1820 (2008), 1888 (2008), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019), establishing a broad spectrum of norms which came to form the WPS agenda. Its transformative

potential lies on conflict-related sexual violence by recognizing the need for a survivor-centered approach to preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

For the AU, implementing the WPS agenda is particularly imperative to achieve the goals set in 'Agenda 2063' and as well as the 'Silencing the Guns' initiative. Further, the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) in July 2003 was a historical milestone in the realization of the rights of women in Africa. The Protocol commits State Parties, among others, to adopt specific measures to combat violence against women, whether in public or private spaces, and to prohibit harmful practices which negatively affect the human rights of women and girls. Explicit mention of violence against women is made in Article 4, which deals with the rights to life, integrity and security of the person.

The AU Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for Peace Support Operations (PSOs) is another key instrument which contributes to the realization of WPS agenda by providing key guidance to personnel of AU PSOs on acts that constitute sexual exploitation and abuse, the duty of personnel to prevent and report such acts as well as consequences of such acts – which can range from disciplinary measures and termination of contracts with the AU to criminal prosecution.

Likewise, UNSCR 1325 is a critical instrument in Africa considering not only the prevalence of conflict related sexual violence but also steps that have been taken by member states and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in developing national action plans (NAPs) and Regional Action Plans (RAPs). To date, in Africa, more than 30 countries have developed NAPs and about five RECs namely the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on

Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) have also adopted RAPs for the implementation of resolution 1325.

Correspondingly, the AU through its Special Envoy office has launched a 10 years Continental Results Framework (CRF) for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa. The Framework aims at ensuring that members deliver on commitments made through the various instruments that have been adopted. In this regard, in line with the CRF aspiration and the PSC's previous request at its 887th session held on 17 October 2019, tomorrow's session serves as an opportunity to receive a briefing from Diop on the state of implementation of the WPS agenda in respect to CRSV. In her briefing, Diop may also provide update on the follow up to the outcome of the 1052nd session of the PSC, which requested her to develop a template for a mechanism for reporting on the implementation of WPS agenda by the member states and the RECs/RMs, and to take into consideration the CRF.

Despite receiving wide recognition, the implementation of what resolution 1325 envisions remains uneven on the continent. As the 22nd year anniversary approaches, women and girls continue to be victims of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, during armed conflicts and in post-conflict settings. In this regard, the PSC in its several meetings including at its 461st, 491st, 555th, 757th sessions echoed a clear message that sexual violence in situations of armed conflict will not be tolerated. The PSC also convened a dedicated session – the 862nd session held on 23 July 2019 – on the theme: "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts in Africa" and further agreed to dedicate an annual open session to CRSV, which will serve as an annual forum for taking stock of progress made and challenges faced in the efforts aimed at ending sexual violence in armed conflicts in Africa.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. PSC is expected to express grave concern about the prevalence of CRSV in various conflict settings and reiterate its condemnation of the use of sexual violence and rape as weapon of war. The PSC may also call for the need for documenting and reporting CRSV as part of the monitoring of conflict situations it is seized with and other crisis situations and underscore the obligations of conflict parties to abide by Resolution 1325, and in this regard, express its support for mechanisms for investigation of CRSV in conflict settings on the continent. It is expected that Council also commends where progress has been made around the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325. Council may call on member states to adopt NAPs and make the necessary budgetary allocation and put in place robust protection and monitoring mechanisms. The PSC may reiterate its previous decisions on the need for survivor-centered responses and states obligations to provide the necessary support to survivors. It may also further call for the increase of the number of women in the security sector as well as in peace processes. The PSC may task the AU Commission to enhance its data collection and reporting on sexual violence with specific recommendations on the strategies for prevention, monitoring and remedying sexual violence, including its due consideration in the conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict rebuilding initiatives.