

Open Session on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa

Open Session on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa Date | 3 November 2022

Tomorrow (03 November), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene a virtual, open session on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa. The session will form Council's 1118th meeting.

Following opening remarks of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Namibia to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Emilia Ndinealo Mkusa, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to deliver a statement. Chido Cleopatra Mpemba, AU Youth Envoy and the African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAPs) are expected to make presentations. Sharonice Busch, Chairperson of the National Youth Council of Namibia and Jayathma Wickramanayake, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth are also expected to make statements.

The last time Council convened a meeting on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa was at its 1080th session held on 25 April 2022. Tomorrow's session constitutes the third meeting convened on the theme during 2022, reflecting growing interest among PSC members on the theme of youth, peace and security in Africa. Ensuring implementation of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security in line with its 10-Year Implementation Plan has been one of the critical points of Council's focus since the finalisation of the Framework in 2020, which Council welcomed at its 933rd session. Further to assessing latest developments relevant to the agenda, tomorrow's session may serve as an occasion for Council to be updated on progress made in implementing the Continental

Framework through the development of National Actions Plans (NAPs), in line with the request of its 1080th session. Council may particularly follow up on the request made at its 1067th session convened on 03 March 2022, for the AU Commission to submit 'Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) for the AU Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security'.

With the purpose of advancing the role of young people in promoting peace and security in the continent, the AU has taken various measures from the adoption of relevant normative instruments such as the 2006 African Youth Charter to the articulation of youth contributions in key AU documents including the AU Constitutive Act, the PSC Protocol and the Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns (STG) in Africa (Lusaka Roadmap). In addition to integrating issues affecting youth in peace and security at the normative level, the AU has also launched initiatives and structures on youth, peace and security. The AU, for example adopted, the Youth for Peace (Y4P) Programme. Within its overall purpose of effectively involving African youth in the promotion of peace and security, the YP4 programme has for instance spearheaded the Youth STG Campaign, a campaign aimed at meaningful mobilisation and engagement of youth agency in realising the STG goals. It has also facilitated the development of the study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security and the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security, which the PSC considered and adopted in May 2020.

In terms of initiatives, one key initiative is the commemoration of 'Africa Youth Day' on the first of November each year and the designation of the month of November as 'Africa Youth Month' which affords the opportunity to undertake various activities that aim to strengthen intercultural exchanges among the youth and promote commitment of relevant stakeholders to invest on African youth. This year's Africa Youth Day/Month is being celebrated under the

theme “Breaking the Barriers to Meaningful Youth Participation and Inclusion in Advocacy”. Tomorrow’s session is accordingly convened as part of the annual ‘Africa Youth Day’.

To advance the message of this year’s Africa Youth Day/Month, Council may deliberate on some of the challenges impeding meaningful youth participation in the maintenance of peace and security in the continent and reflect on effective approaches that can address these challenges. Limitation of financial resources and technical expertise committed to youth initiatives, limited role and space for youth in formal peacebuilding programmes, poor coordination and lack of inclusivity among youth groups and limited awareness among young people of the contributions they can make are some of the constraints to meaningful youth engagement and participation that have been highlighted in the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security. Addressing these challenges primarily requires serious regard by governments and political leaders that take youth as serious and critical partners in promoting peace and security rather than viewing them as either victims or perpetrators of threats to peace and security or merely as actors to just be talked to.

Of particular significance in addressing these issues and creating avenues for realising the policy commitments is the establishment of the national youth, peace and security action plan by member states. It is worth recalling that the continental strategy has the ambition of having 40% of AU member states adopting the national action plan by 2029. The members of the PSC may seek to reflect on the progress made towards achieving this and the strategy the AU is deploying towards this end.

Not only does over 60% of Africa’s population consist of young people, the continent also has the youngest, largest and fastest growing population globally. This youth population is one of Africa’s key resources which if harnessed well, could play a fundamental role in achieving the continent’s

developmental aspirations and goals. It is in that spirit that AU's Agenda 2063 recognises the potential and important role of Africa's youth in achieving the aspiration of a prosperous Africa. Ensuring meaningful participation and engagement of the youth in Africa's peace and security agenda is an essential component of harnessing the capacity of this significant portion of the continent's population. It is hence important to take deliberate steps to ensure that African youth are well engaged in the various efforts for conflict prevention, including in the promotion of a culture of peace, conflict management and resolution measures. This in turn requires that the issues affecting youth and the role of youth are factored in from the early stages of the designing and planning of conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy, mediation, peace making, and other conflict management and resolution processes to the process of implementation of the same.

In terms of translating the various policy commitments and initiatives on youth, peace and security, it may be of interest to the PSC to have a targeted approach that takes account of the variabilities of issues relating to youth, peace and security across counties and different youth groups. For example, it is critical that AU's work on youth, peace and security prioritises the needs and role of youth in context of situations of conflict and political crisis. Attention should be given not only to ensure the integration of youth in initiatives to address such situations but also to promote the development and implementation of programs dedicated to supporting and rehabilitating youth with particular attention to female youth affected by violence in such situations of conflict and political crisis. With respect to conflict prevention, early warning and conflict analysis work of the AU need also to incorporate youth specific indicators for enabling responses that enhance the role of youth and address the issues affecting youth, including those specific to female youth.

Further to noting the importance of active involvement of the youth in efforts along the lines highlighted above and the various advocacy and promotional work of the AU Youth, Peace and Security Program, the Youth Envoy and the AYAPs undertake in pursuit of the agenda of youth, peace and security in Africa, it may also interest the Council to reflect on some of the socio-economic and political conditions that create insecurity for youth. Corrupt government practices, marginalisation, unemployment, exploitative youth employment and violations of human rights and freedoms can be mentioned as few examples of governance related issues that make Africa's young population susceptible to insecurity, including being lured into organized crimes, militia groups and radicalisation by terrorist groups. Addressing governance deficits is therefore key aspect of preventing the continent's young population from being victims and participants of various conditions of threats to peace and security. As such, it is critical for the AYAPs, the AU Youth Envoy and other relevant actors to promote the initiation and implementation of political and socio-economic governance reforms, including by harnessing the recommendations and decisions of AU governance and human rights institutions such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Peer Review Mechanism and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a Press Statement. Council may take note of progress made in implementing the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security and encourage member States to strengthen efforts aimed at adopting NAPs. It may commend the continued efforts and contributions of the AU Youth Envoy and AYAPs towards the full realisation of the Continental Framework and other relevant AU norms and policies on peace and security. It may emphasise the need for meaningful involvement of the youth in peace efforts and encourage member States to take deliberate measures to create space for youth participation in various

aspects of peace processes including decision-making roles. Council may further underscore the importance of strengthening trust between governments and their young populations for the sustainability of peace and development and for attaining the aspiration of a prosperous Africa. It may also call on the AU Commission to strengthen its collaborations with Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) in supporting member States' efforts to develop NAPs for the implementation of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security. The PSC may also call for a more targeted approach to the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda with a focus on youth in situations of conflict and political crisis, with particular attention to female youth and request in this respect that the AU Commission develops strategy which prioritizes situations of conflict and political crisis. The PSC may also underscore the need to mainstream the youth, peace and security theme in all the peace and security and governance work of the AU from prevention to post-conflict reconstruction and development by deploying youth centred analytical lens in conflict analysis and policy response proposals and initiatives.