

Prevention of the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa

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Tomorrow (06 April), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1147th session, which will be in-person open session on the theme 'prevention of the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa'.

Following opening remarks by Abdelhamid El Gharbi, Permanent Representative of Tunisia and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of April, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a statement. Presentations are also expected by the representative of Rwanda, the Special Advisor of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and the representative of the European Union (EU).

Tomorrow's session is to be convened in line with the Communique of the PSC adopted at the 678th session of April 2017, which decided to convene annually in April an open meeting on the prevention of the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa. It forms part of the annual commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda that will be observed on 7 April in accordance with the AU Assembly Decision [[Assembly/ AU / Dec.695](#)] of 2 July 2018 as well as the Communique of the PSC adopted at its 761st session. As noted in the concept note, the main objective of the annual session is for 'the PSC, AU Member States and other key stakeholders to reflect and continuously devise means to collectively prevent the ideology of hate, genocide and hate

crimes in Africa’.

Various decisions have been taken by the PSC since 2017 to effectively address the challenge of the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa. These include: reinvigorating the early warning mechanism (836th session); including an analysis on indicators of hate crime and risk factors for them to escalate to genocide in the Report of the PSC on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa (836th session); constructing AU Human Rights Memorial dedicated to victims of human rights violations in Africa (989th session); appointing an AU Special Envoy on the Prevention of Hate Crimes and the Crime of Genocide (989th session); developing a shared definition of what constitutes ‘hate speech’ and ‘hate crimes’ (1088th session); undertaking a review of the status of implementation of the recommendations contained in the Report of the OAU International Panel of Eminent Personalities on the 1994 Rwanda Genocide and the Surrounding Events by the Panel of the Wise (1088th session); establishing an Annual African Forum on the prevention of ideology of hate, hate crimes and genocide (1088th session); and creating an African Centre for the Study of Genocide (1088th session). It would be important for the PSC to follow up on the status of the implementation of these decisions at tomorrow’s session. Among others, considering that 2024 marks 30 years since the occurrence of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, it would be of interest for members of the PSC to plan for a continental comprehensive stock taking exercise for reaffirming the commitment to never again as enshrined in Article 4 (h) of the Constitutive Act of the AU.

Experiences from the Rwanda and elsewhere in the world clearly highlight that genocide and other atrocity crimes do not occur as isolated event but are often results of sustained hate speech. Hate speech and hate propaganda were identified as

catalysts of the genocidal violence in Rwanda. As noted in the concept note prepared for the session, in Rwanda, the 'genocide ideology was propagated when political leaders using state machinery started branding a section of their own population – the Tutsi – as the 'other', 'enemy of the State', 'cockroaches' who were to be exterminated.' Indeed, as highlighted in PSC's 678th session, deliberate tendencies of discrimination, marginalization, tribalism and manipulation of ethnicity often create conducive conditions for hate crimes and ideologies of genocide to thrive.

The nature of hate speech has evolved in complexity as a result of the digital turn, particularly with the widespread use of social media that has dramatically changed the 'pace and reach of its spread'. This was noted by the PSC on several occasions including at its 836th session, which expressed its 'deep concern' over the negative use of social media that contributes to amplify hate speech, hate crimes, and ideology of genocide. Despite that these platforms claim to have invested in safety and security measures including building their capacity to catch hateful and inflammatory content, reports are raising the alarm over the use of social media by different actors to stoke violence particularly in a fragile context.

Countering the rising tide of hate speech and the attendant consequences requires taking effective preventive and mitigation strategies. It is important that Member States put in place the necessary legal framework to punish hate speeches and hate crimes, but this should also strike the right balance with the fundamental human right to freedom of expression. While there is a need to regulate online content, governments also should not fall into the common tactic of internet/social media shutdown as this kind of measure undermines range of human rights, including the right to freedom of speech. Instead, spreading counter-speech that disseminates accurate information and that fosters unity and tolerance is regarded

as the proper response to ensure that hate is not the dominant narrative. In addition to these, tomorrow's session is expected to emphasize on the need to develop comprehensive strategies that focused not only on mitigation measures, but also on prevention to address the scourge in a more sustainable way.

First and foremost, there is a need to address root causes and drivers of ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes. Socio-economic and political marginalization, competing aspirations, and contested historical narratives often sow the seeds of mistrust and fear among different groups, which leads to polarization and tension. Accordingly, building credible state institutions, fostering peaceful and inclusive societies including through national dialogue, deepening democracy and participatory as well as inclusive governance, and ensuring equitable and inclusive socio-economic developments could be highlighted as important steps in addressing the underlying causes and drivers of hate.

Second and related to the first is the imperative of leveraging education, both in formal and non-formal settings, as a tool for addressing all forms of intolerance, discrimination and hate while simultaneously building a generation that embrace cultural diversity and promote peaceful coexistence.

Third, there is also a need to enhance prevention strategies at all levels (national, regional, and continental) through early warning system that would enable us to detect early signs of genocide and other atrocity crimes. Equally important is translating the early signs into early response, although denialism and a very restrictive interpretation of the principle of sovereignty by Member States have proved to be a challenge in that regard.

Fourth and importantly, there is a need for the establishment of an inclusive system of governance that is representative of

all sectors of society and their interests. More often than not, the sense of alienation, exclusion and discrimination in a context of power contestations is what creates the setting for the emergence of identity-based antagonism, precipitating hate speech and incitement of violence. It is of paramount importance that the conditions of bad governance and lack of inclusiveness is also addressed.

The expected outcome of the session is likely to be a communique. As in the previous sessions, PSC may express its concern over the persistent trend of the ideologies of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa, and in that regard, it may highlight the importance of developing comprehensive strategies to counter the ideologies of hate, genocide, and hate crimes. It may condemn in the strongest terms denialism and revisionism of the genocide against Tutsi as this threatens the perpetuation and manifestations of hate speech and crimes. As part of the effort to counter hate speech and crimes, PSC may highlight different measures, including encouraging Member States to establish/strengthen their legal framework to combat the scourge and meet their international obligations, as well as ratify/accede to relevant international legal instruments notably the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. While stressing the importance of the responsible use of the media, and in particular the social media, PSC may also remind Member States about the need to ensure that measures to combat hate speech and hate crimes do not violate accepted principles and standards of human rights. In relation to enhancing the prevention strategies, PSC may reiterate the need for addressing structural causes and drivers of hate speech and hate crimes including through credible national dialogue, education, and other national initiatives to entrench the culture of peaceful coexistence and democracy, and foster national unity and reconciliation. It is also expected to re-emphasize the importance of enhancing AU's early warning mechanism to detect early warning signs and take early

response before hate speech and crimes degenerate into violent conflicts and genocide. Furthermore, considering the various decisions of the PSC that have been taken since 2017 to effectively address the scourge of hate speech and hate crimes and considering that 2024 marks the 30 years commemoration of the 1994 genocide, PSC may request the AU Commission to plan a high-level and comprehensive stocktaking on progress made and challenges faced in implementing never again.