

Provisional Program of Work for the Month of January 2024

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Date | January 2024

Ghana will be chairing the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) in January 2024. The provisional programme of work for the month envisages five sessions, of which three will address country/region specific issues whereas the remaining two will have a thematic focus. All of the sessions planned for the month will be taking place at the ambassadorial level. The PSC also plans to undertake a field visit to Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, on 27 and 28 January.

The first session of the month is scheduled to be held on 8 January. The session will assess the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau. The recent origin of this crisis goes back to the June 2023 legislative elections which secured a majority of 54 parliamentary seats for a coalition led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) rather than the parties affiliated with the president of the country. PAIGC's victory was followed by a sequence of events including detention of key personalities in the government particularly the Economy and Finance Minister and the Secretary of State for Treasury. On 1 December, the situation erupted into armed confrontations between the Presidential Guard and the National Guard. Claiming that this incident constituted an attempted coup, on 4 December, President Umaro Sissoco Embaló of Guinea-Bissau dissolved the National People's Assembly (NPA), an act apparently not consistent with the Constitution. The president then immediately appointed new commanders of the National Guard and new representatives within the interior and defence ministries. The AU Commission Chairperson in a statement of 5

December expressed concern on the situation in Guinea Bissau, including the dissolution of parliament and called on 'the government and national stakeholders... to respect the Constitution.' Similarly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the communique of its 64th ordinary session, while condemning the violence that took place on 1 December, called for 'the full respect of the national Constitution and ...quick restoration of all national institutions.' In a 21 December statement, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General also called on 'all parties to respect the Constitution'. The proposed session under PSC's chair-ship of Ghana, ECOWAS member state, affords the PSC the opportunity for discussing the unfolding constitutional crisis in Guinea-Bissau and how the AU can contribute towards both the prevention of the situation from further deteriorating and the restoration of constitutionality through respecting separation of powers by including what ECOWAS called 'quick restoration of all national institutions', which essentially means the reversal of the dissolution of the NPA.

On 23 January, the PSC will convene its second session of the month to consider and endorse the 'Report on the Activities of the Peace and Security Council and the State of Peace and Security in Africa'. In line with Article 7 of the PSC Protocol and established practice, having considered the report, the PSC will submit it to the 37th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly scheduled to take place in mid-February 2024. As always, the report is expected to provide details of both the various activities that the PSC undertook over the course of 2023 and an assessment of Africa's peace and security landscape during the reporting period.

The third session is expected to be held on 25 January and will be committed to PSC's bi-annual consideration of the half-year report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on elections in Africa. Following from the 1165th session when the

PSC considered the Chairperson's report on elections conducted in the continent during the first half of 2023, the forthcoming session is expected to consider the report on elections conducted during the second half of the year – July to December 2023. In addition, the report is also expected to provide information on upcoming elections taking place in 2024, with a focus on those expected to be held during the first half of the year. Some of the critical elections from the second half of 2023 that could be expected to feature in the report and thus generate some discussion in the PSC are the Central African Republic's (CAR) and Chad's constitutional referendums conducted on 30 July and 17 December 2023 respectively, as well as the very recently concluded general elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) held under contested circumstances. In addition to Burkina Faso whose presidential election is expected to take place in 2024 as per the transition calendar, other two upcoming elections that may be highlighted in the Chairperson's report and discussed by the PSC include the presidential elections in Comoros and Senegal, both slated to take place in the first quarter of 2024.

The PSC's filed mission to Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, will be its next activity after the session on 25 January. It is to be recalled that last February, the PSC scheduled to undertake this mission but was unable to proceed due to a lack of collaboration. Planned to be undertaken on 27 and 28 January, the field mission could serve as an opportunity for the PSC to engage with the interim regional government of Tigray, civil society actors and members of displaced communities currently hosted in the region's capital, Mekelle, on the status of implementation of the Pretoria Agreement and other key ongoing concerns.

On 30 January, the PSC will convene its fourth meeting of the month to consider the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and

the renewal of the force's mandate. At its 1126th session convened on 12 December 2022, the PSC renewed MNJTF's mandate for one year starting from 1 February 2023. Aside from renewing the force's mandate which would expire on 31 January 2024, the PSC is also expected to reflect on the overall situation in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB), with a specific focus on trends in the threat of terrorism, illicit transfer of arms and status of MNJTF efforts aimed at degrading Boko Haram.

The last session of the month is scheduled to be held on 31 January. It will be committed to an updated briefing on the peace process in Ethiopia, specifically the monitoring, verification and compliance mechanism (MVCM) and consideration of the report of the PSC on its field mission to the Tigray region of Ethiopia. While the signing and launch of AU's MVCM on 29 December 2022 had been an important step to contribute towards the implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, the PSC has not had a chance to receive updates on the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the peace agreement and the work of the MVCM. Only one meeting – the 1158th session held on 15 June 2023 – discussed the situation in Ethiopia in 2023, within the context of the session's broader engagement on the situation in the Horn of Africa. The coming meeting hence presents the opportunity for the PSC to receive key updates including on its previous request for the AU Commission to 'undertake a needs assessment for the extension of the deployment of the MVCM'.

The PSC Committee of Experts (CoE) is also scheduled to meet during the month, on 9 and 10 as well as on 16 and 17 January. On each of those occasions, the focus will be to consider the 'Report on the Activities of the Peace and Security Council and the State of Peace and Security in Africa', before it is tabled to the PSC on 23 January as elaborated above.

The provisional programme of work for the month also indicates in the footnote that there may be a session on the situation

in Sudan. The fast deteriorating security, human rights and humanitarian situation warrants a follow up by the PSC including on the implementation of its decision of the 15th November 2023 ministerial session, which, among others, stipulated the establishment of a high-level panel and tasked the AU Commission with the responsibility of constituting the Panel.

***Post-script:** In the revised program of work (PoW), the session on Guinea-Bissau has been indefinitely postponed, as informed by the AU Commission. In addition, PSC's Field Mission to Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, and the updated briefing session on the peace process in Ethiopia have been removed from the PoW, following Ethiopia's notification that the timing was inconvenient for facilitating the Mission. On the other hand, the revised PoW has introduced three more sessions: updates on the selection process of the African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (30 January), consideration of the AU PCRDR Policy (31 January), and commemoration of Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation (31 January).

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