

Consideration of the Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the activities of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and renewal of mandate

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Tomorrow (January 18) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold its 973rd session to consider the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the European Union (EU)-AU support to the Force. The PSC is also expected to renew the mandate of the MNJTF. The session will take place through VTC.

The chair of the month Senegal is expected to make opening remarks. The Peace and Security Department (PSD) is expected to provide a brief to the Council on the activities of MNJTF. The representative of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Head of the MNJTF may also deliver statements.

Representatives of member states of LCBC plus Benin and the EU are also expected to make statements.

The last time the PSC convened a session on Lake Chad region was during its 898th meeting held on 28 November 2019 where the Council, among others, renewed the mandate of the MNJTF until 31 January 2020; requested the Commission to make efforts towards mobilizing more additional support for the Task Force in filling its regional capability gaps and humanitarian support; as well as regularly update the Council

on the situation in the region. As a follow-up session, the report of the Chairperson is expected to highlight the recent developments in the region, and provide update on the activities of the MNJTF since the last session.

This session comes against the backdrop of intensified militant attacks that continued to ravage the Lake Chad region, including the gruesome attacks in Niger, Nigeria and Chad. Chairperson's report is expected to capture the recent bouts of violence unleashed by Boko Haram and other militant groups, reflecting the continued threat to the peace and security of the region despite the significant gain made by MNJTF and member states of the LCBC plus Benin in the fight against the former.

The latest in a series of attacks is the deadly violence that hit villages of southwestern Niger near the Malian border on January 2, reportedly killing 100 people. This came less than a month after the attack attributed to Boko Haram targeting Niger's Diffa region that left at least 27 civilians dead and 800 homes burned. Boko Haram also continued to wreak havoc in Nigeria's restive Borno state and beyond over the course of 2020. On December 11, gunmen stormed boys school located in Kankara (Nigeria's northwestern Katsina State) and abducted around 110 boys whose release was secured later on. One of the deadliest attack yet unleashed in November when suspected Boko Haram militants massacred more than 110 farmers in a village near Borno's capital Maiduguri, not to mention its ambush in northern Yobe state in March killing at least 50 soldiers. Chad has not been spared by the militant's attack- close to 100 Chadian soldiers were killed in March in Lac province, which is one of the hotspots of Boko Haram's insurgency bordering Niger and Nigeria.

Tomorrow's session is also expected to pay greater heed to the structural problems prevailing in Lake Chad region. A shift from short-term military operations towards a long-term development measures that would address the root causes of

instability is required to achieve sustainable peace in the region. The PSC highlighted this issue in its previous meeting by stressing the importance of addressing 'political, social and developmental challenges affecting the region, including food insecurity exacerbated by the shrinking water resources of the Lake Chad'. Similarly, the UN Security Council, in its resolution 2349 (2017), called upon governments in the region to take measures to address 'social, political, economic and gender inequalities, and environmental challenges', placing the focus on the root causes of the crisis.

It was also in recognition of the need to bring a shift from military engagements towards tackling root causes of the crisis that the AUC, LCBC and development partners devised a Regional Stabilization Strategy (RSS) in 2017, endorsed by the PSC during its 816th session held on December 5, 2018. The RSS seeks to bring stabilization, resilience and recovery of the affected areas of the four countries around Lake Chad basin, namely Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. In this context, the PSC is expected to receive updates on the progresses made towards the implementation of the different pillars outlined in the strategy.

One development that would interest the PSC members in this respect could be the recent World Bank initiative, which rolled out two projects worth of \$346 million in May 2020 that aimed at strengthening resilience and livelihoods in the Lake Chad region. The Council may also take note of the various projects of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) undertaken in the affected areas of the Lake Chad basin under it's the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) – an initiative launched by UNDP in 2019 with the support of Germany, Sweden, UK and EU to facilitate the implementation of RSS. The briefing by the PSD may further elaborate on the implementation of the RSS through the RSF including the construction of infrastructure and provision of basic services to communities.

Given PSC's call for developing communication strategies that would enable to win the hearts and minds of the people of Lake Chad region during its 898th session, the recent regional workshop organized by MNJTF and the LCBC, in collaboration with UNDP, held at N'Djamena in October 2020 would likely interest PSC members. Featuring high profile speakers and drawing attendants from wide spectrum of stakeholders, the 5-day workshop was meant to provide a foundation for an inclusive regional communication strategy aimed at countering radical narratives propagated by extremist groups as well as discouraging sympathy and support to the latter.

Another issue likely to feature in the PSC's discussion is the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region, a concern also reiterated by the UN Security Council during its February 11 presidential statement on the conditions in Sahel and Lake Chad Basin., The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in its briefing December 15 painted a gloomy picture of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the region and the huge financial gaps to respond to the crisis. According to the briefing, the violence in Lake Chad displaced 2.9 million internally and forced some 300,000 people to flee violence as refugees. Only 52 percent of the required \$126.3 million fund has been secured thus far. The situation is further exacerbated by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was particularly highlighted during the Ambassadorial-level meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the impact of Covid-19 in the Lake Chad Basin held on September 9. The meeting, among others, noted the impact of Covid-19 in compounding the security and humanitarian situation of the Lake Chad and its disproportionate effects on women and girls.

The PSC is also expected to receive a briefing on the EU-AU support to the MNJTF through the African Peace Facility. The briefing is expected to highlight the activities undertaken in in the first phase support, which ended in December 2020, and the activities that will be included in the second phase that

will run from January to December 2021. The briefing may also present the challenges that the MNJTF continues to face in conducting its operation.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may commend the MNJTF, LCBC member states and Benin for their efforts and progresses achieved in the fight against Boko Haram. The Council may express its concern over the continued security threat and the deteriorating humanitarian situation. In this regard, the Council may once again urge the Commission, LCBC member states plus Benin, RECs, and international partners to enhance their efforts in terms of supporting MNJTF's capability as well as mobilizing the required resources that would enable the regional force to effectively respond to the security threats. The PSC is also likely to reiterate the need to adopt comprehensive approach in countering Boko Haram and the importance of tackling the root causes of violence that keeps providing fodder for Boko Haram and other extremists in the region. The Council may further call upon member states, sub-regional, regional and international organizations, donors and other stakeholders to step-up their efforts in the realization of the regional stabilization strategy that seeks to bring stabilization, recovery and resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas.

The PSC may commend the EU for the continued support to the MNJTF. Given the increasing attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram and the need to sustain combat operations by the regional force, the PSC may decide to renew the mandate of MNJTF for another 12 months.