PSC Ministerial on Implementation of Aspects of Peace and Security related to the AU Border Governance Strategy

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Tomorrow (19 August) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold a ministerial meeting on the 'Implementation of Aspects of Peace and Security related to the AU Border Governance Strategy'.

Following the opening remark by MBELLA MBELLA, Minister of External Relations of Republic of Cameroon and Chairperson of the PSC for August, a statement will be delivered by Christophe Lutundula, Vice-Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is also expected that the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, will make a presentation.

Tomorrow's ministerial session will deliberate on the Continental Strategy for Better Integrated Border Governance. It is to be recalled that the strategy was initially adopted in 2019 by the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Defence, Safety and Security and further endorsed by the 33rd ordinary session of the AU Assembly in February 2020. The AU Border Program (AUBP) has launched the strategy in March 2021 to popularize the instrument and 'to enhance peace and security initiatives, bilateral cooperation as well as borderland development between and among neighbouring countries'.

The strategy is anchored in five pillars including development

of capabilities for border governance; conflict prevention and resolution, border security and transnational threats; mobility, migration and trade facilitation; cooperative border management and borderland development and community engagement. The session may be utilized to build ownership and sensitize member states on the continental strategy. Moreover, in line with the theme of the ministerial session, the deliberations are expected to particularly focus on the security pillar of the strategy. In this context the session may highlight the importance of dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation for peaceful settlement of border disputes, best practices of handling emerging border disputes and effective border management. It may further underline the importance of utilizing judicial actions only after exhausting options related to negotiation and dialogue.

As indicated in the strategy the security threats due to borders mainly emanate from two sources. The first is related to boundary disputes between states or communities. Currently, only one third of Africa's 170,000 km inter-state borders have been demarcated and this has been a major security challenge. The AU is currently seized with 27 cases of border disputes. While the AUBP provides technical support to member states, the resolution of these cases primarily requires political will of disputing parities. This also implies that both disputing parties have to agree to involve the AU and submit joint request in order for the AU to offer support.

The second form of border insecurity is caused due to crimes and security threats along borderlands, which then have effects on the stability of countries and more broadly on regions. Poor border governance and porous borders have been particularly linked to security threats including transnational organized crimes, flow of illicit weapons and violent extremism and terrorism. Non-states actors have exploited the limited control along borders to intensify their operations as witnessed in various conflict hotspots in the

Lake Chad, Sahel and Horn of Africa regions.

In addition to land borders, maritime boundary dispute has also become a concerning security area. The PSC during its 873rd session has considered the maritime dispute between Somalia and Kenya. Although the case was being considered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the PSC has called on both parties to find amicable and sustainable solution.

In terms of the roll out and implementation of the strategy the session offers an opportunity to reflect on the role of various actors including the AUC, member states and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanism (RMs). RECs/RMs may play a significant role in bringing closer members states and the AU. To leverage from such coordination it is imperative to ensure policy harmonization and coordination between member states and RECs towards the realization of the continental border strategy. In this regard the PSC may reiterate its previous call made during its 930th session, which requested the 'AUC to develop an AU training curricula on border governance and to convene regional training programs'.

Although not articulated in the strategy, the session may also deliberate on the impact of COVID19 on border management and cross border cooperation. The fight against the pandemic has limited cooperation between communities across borders and it also affected diplomatic initiatives that aimed at resolving border disputes. On the other hand poor border governance may also be a risk in the spread of public health threats such as COVID19.

In previous PSC sessions on border management, the AUBP has presented the report of its activities. However for tomorrow's session the intervention from the Commission is prepared along three main objectives. The first is to seek extension of the deadline for the completion of the delimitation and demarcation of all African inter-state borders, which will

expire in 2022. The Commission is set to request additional five years and extend the deadline to 2027. It is to be recalled that in 2016 during PSC's 603rd session the Commission has made a similar request to extend the deadline from 2017 to 2022. It would be of interest of PSC members to also seek clarification on the factors that continue to impede the realization of this goal. It would also be important to see how the extension will also fit into new timeframe for Silencing the Guns by 2030.

Given that the session is the first one after the official launch of the new AUC structure, the second main objective of the briefing is expected to explore mechanisms on how to integrate the AUBP in the new PAPS Department as a standalone program. The AUBP report presented during PSC's 930th session has indeed expressed concern over the fate of the program within the new structure. Hence the session will offer an opportunity to address this institutional challenge and based on the mandate and scope of the program may provide guidance on the program's position in the new structure. Beyond this, the sustainability of the program also requires boosting its capacity so that the program can effectively respond to requests from member states and discharge its mandate.

The third objective is to call for more member states to ratify the AU Convention on Cross Border Cooperation (the Niamey Convention). With Guinea being the latest country to ratify the Convention, a total of six member states have ratified it so far including Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Togo. For the instrument to enter into force it requires the ratification by at least fifteen member states.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may call on the AUC to further promote and popularize the Continental Border Governance Strategy. It may urge member states and RECs/RM to develop national and regional border policies based on the AU Border Governance Strategy. The PSC may reiterate the importance of negotiation and reconciliation in settling

border disputes. It may underline the importance of border management in the fight against transnational crime, violent extremism and terrorism. The PSC may state the importance of keeping the AUBP as a standalone unit within PAPS. It may extend the deadline for the completion of the delimitation and demarcation of African inter-state borders to 2027. It may call on member states to ratify, domesticate and implement all relevant instruments including the Niamey Convention and the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lome Charter).