

PSC Session on Living Together in Peace

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Tomorrow (17 May), African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1084th session on Living Together in Peace.

Following opening remarks by Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, Permanent Representative of Cameroon to the AU and the Chairperson of the PSC for the month of May, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), is expected to make a statement. AU Commission for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, Minata Samate Cessouma is scheduled to make presentation. The representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Amani Africa, and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) are also expected to make statements at tomorrow's session.

Tomorrow's open session on Living Together in Peace is convened within the framework of Council's decision, at its 891st session held on 5 November 2019, to dedicate an annual session to commemorate the International Day of Living Together in Peace, as a forum for continuously raising public awareness and taking stock of efforts undertaken by Member States in upholding the UN General Assembly resolution 72/130. It is to be recalled that the UN General Assembly, on 8 December 2017, adopted resolution 72/130 declaring 16 May as the 'International Day of Living Together in Peace'. The International Day of Living Together in peace, as highlighted in the resolution, is a means of 'regularly mobilizing the efforts of the international community to promote peace,

tolerance, inclusion, understanding and solidarity, and to express its attachment to the desire to live and act together, united in differences and diversity, in order to build a sustainable world of peace, solidarity and harmony’.

It is worth noting that Algeria played an important role in the adoption of the General Assembly resolution, on the basis of its national experience in deradicalization and the fight against extremism. PSC’s decision to make the theme of Living Together in Peace as one of its standing agenda items was also taken during the chairship of Algeria in November 2019. Council has dedicated three sessions so far, the last being held on 13 May 2021 at its 995th session. Tomorrow’s session will be Council’s fourth dedicated session on Living Together in Peace.

The second dedicated session, which was held on 27 May 2020, had a specific focus on the Covid-19 pandemic and its implication on living together in peace in the continent. On the other hand, the last dedicated session was focused on drawing a linkage between AU’s 2021 theme: “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers of The Building of Africa We Want” and living together in peace. Accordingly, the utility of art and culture for the promotion of tolerance, inclusivity and peace was highlighted. As this session comes amid the war in Ukraine and heightened geo-political rivalry, PSC members may take the opportunity to reflect on how the crisis impact multilateralism and the commitment towards living together in peace more broadly. Even in 2020, the Council, at its 928th session on COVID-19 and Living Together in Peace, noted with concern the ‘rise of geo-political rivalry between major powers of the world’ and its impact on multilateralism and Africa’s peace and security landscape.

Apart from the major power rivalry, of interest to the Council is the rising trend of identity-based violence, hate speech, and radicalization and extremism in the continent as

highlighted by the Council at its 891st and 989th sessions, among others. Often, the issue of identity-based violence is linked with political exclusions and political manipulation of existing ethnic or religious divisions. Bias and favoritism to a certain ethnic or religious group in the distribution of political power and economic benefits to the exclusion of the 'others' create sense of marginalization. This not only widens the rift between the state and society but also fuels inter-communal tension and violence, particularly in a fragile setting. Indeed, the PSC flagged such concerns during its 891st sessions where it highlighted governance deficits such as exclusion, marginalization, mismanagement of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity as some of the root causes of conflicts in the continent. In a context of mineral rich African countries, Council in the same session stressed unequal distribution of proceeds from national resources among the structural causes of violent conflicts. In some cases, gender inequality, ethnic and religious polarization, coupled with the rise of hate speech (both online and offline) and disinformation, is destroying social fabric of communities, thereby triggering inter-communal violence.

Another key issue Council likely to focus on is the deteriorating humanitarian condition of the continent and growing needs for humanitarian assistance. Cessouma's presentation may also highlight this issue in her presentation, building on the two previous sessions already conducted this month on humanitarian related themes. More than 114 million people in 15 most affected African countries require urgent assistance in 2022, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The number of people facing a critical lack of food has more than tripled where nearly 282 million are undernourished in the continent. Food security crisis in Africa has reached a disaster level, according to the International Community of the Red Cross (ICRC). It reported that 346 million people (one

in four Africans) are facing severe food insecurity. Despite the alarming trend, the humanitarian response plans have been limited and funding gap remains large. The COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the humanitarian crisis and resulted in a reversal of a hard-won progress on poverty reduction in the continent. A report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) indicates that 'COVID-19 pandemic pushed an estimated 55 million African into extreme poverty in 2020 and reversed more than two decades of progress in poverty reduction on the continent'.

On the other hand, the continent has been witnessing the phenomenon of youth bulge with almost 60 percent of Africa's population being under the age of 25, making Africa world's youngest continent. While this by itself is not a problem (it can even be transformed into a demographic dividend), youth bulge may however risk political instability and exacerbate social tension when coupled with other structural conditions such as high unemployment, marginalization, absence of political space, and social fragmentation.

The expected outcome is a press statement. Council is expected to express concern over the ongoing geo-political rivalry between major powers its impact on multilateralism as well as on the peace and stability of the continent. In this respect, Council may appeal to all states to renew their commitment to multilateralism as international cooperation has become more crucial than ever to address global challenges. It may also re-emphasize the imperative of Africa speaking with one voice in defending and promoting common positions and interests. Council may express its concern over increasing trends of inter-communal violence, hate speech, radicalization and extremism, and in this regard, it may reiterate its 995th session that stressed the importance of 'adopting inclusive national policies for addressing situations of exclusion and marginalization in society'. Council may urge Member States and RECs to protect, promote and respect human rights

principles and standards as well as cultural, ethnic, religious diversity and gender equality. In terms of addressing root causes of conflicts, Council may in addition stress the importance of ensuring inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development, addressing governance deficit, and promoting democracy and rule of law in order to realize the aspiration to Live Together in Peace. Ensuring equal participation of the youth and women in decision making process is also expected to be highlighted in the outcome document.