

# **Sustainable Peace in Africa and Implementation of Paragraph 15 of Ext/Assembly/AU/Dec.1(XIV)**

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Tomorrow (09 March) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 984th session. In this first Heads of State and Government session of the PSC since February 2020, there are two agenda items that the session is envisaged to address. The first one will be on sustainable peace in Africa, which will have a particular focus on climate change and its impacts on peace and security on the continent. The second agenda item will be a follow up on the implementation of paragraph 15 of the decision on Silencing the Guns of the 14th Extraordinary summit, held at the level of Heads of State and Government (Ext/Assembly/AU/Dec.1(XIV)). According to PSC's agenda for the 984th session, Council will also be addressing any other issues under 'AOB'.

Opening remarks are expected to be delivered by H.E Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya and PSC Chairperson for March 2021; H.E Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Chairperson of the AU; and H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission. The Representative of the UN Secretary General, as well as H.E Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security, will also be making presentations with regards to both agenda items. In addition, a statement will be delivered by H.E Josefa Correia Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture regarding the first agenda item with specific reference to climate change. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the PSC, on the second agenda item, the Heads of

State of the two states concerned, namely His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of the Kingdom of Morocco and H.E Brahim Ghali, President of Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, are expected to make statements. The AU Troika – DRC, Senegal and South Africa – are also expected to take active part in the discussions of both agenda items, along with all PSC Member States.

Since its first session on the issue of climate change and peace and security in Africa at its 585th session in 2016, the PSC has held a further four sessions focusing on this theme, namely the 660th, 708th, 774th and 828th sessions. The most recent previous PSC session of the 828th session had a focus on funding for climate change to contribute towards the maintenance of peace and security, in line with the African Adaptation Initiative (AAI) – an initiative launched with the aim of ensuring that Africa urgently adapts to the adverse effects of climate change. It is to be recalled that Council noted the inextricable linkage between climate change and peace and security.

Tomorrow's discussion on climate change is expected to emphasise the serious implications of climate change on peacebuilding efforts in the continent, as well as its effects on socio-economic developments and emerging threats to security in Africa, such as terrorism. Despite contributing only 4 % of global carbon dioxide emissions, African countries carry nearly 60 percent of the double burden of climate change induced severe weather events and political fragility risks in the world. In this context, Sacko is expected to highlight how climate change induced environmental degradation and depletion of scarce resources affect food security, social cohesion and stability and how extreme weather events such as severe droughts, floods and cyclones increasingly threaten the security of people on the continent. The PSC, at its 901st session, stressing that natural disasters and climate change contribute to exacerbating existing tensions, called on states

'to reinforce measures to address effects of climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters, particularly in conflict-affected areas within the context of the AU Solemn Declaration to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020.' Indeed, inter-communal clashes, exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, has become a major source of violence in Nigeria and in much of the Sahel in recent years. Having regard to the unavoidable interlinkage between climate change and peace and security, Council may call on Member States to contextualise climate change impacts in their national peacebuilding efforts and implementation of all relevant resolutions and instruments within the African peacebuilding architecture.

In addition to its climate change focused discussion, Council is also expected to reflect more broadly on steps required to ensure sustainability of peace on the continent. To that end, it may evaluate policy measures adopted at the international, regional and national levels in order to assess their effectivity in addressing the root causes of violence in Africa. The role the youth for maintaining peace and security on the continent, particularly in ensuring sustainability of efforts is also of considerable value and may be an area of reflection. The PSC may also reflect on finding ways to increase predictable financing of peacebuilding efforts in Africa, specifically, of those set under AU's Silencing the Guns (STG) initiative and Agenda 2063.

The second agenda item is a follow up on the implementation of paragraph 15 of Ext/Assembly/AU/Dec.1(XIV). 'Expressing deep concern over the escalating military tensions between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Sahrawi Republic that have developed in Al- Guerguerat, the narrow Buffer Strip in Western Sahara, leading to the violation of the 1991 Ceasefire Agreement', the AU Assembly in that paragraph calls on the PSC to engage the Kingdom of Morocco and Sahrawi Republic to address the escalating military tension. According to the

Assembly, this is critical 'in order to prepare conditions for a new cease-fire and to reach a just and durable solution to the conflict, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in line with the relevant AU-UN decisions and resolutions and the objectives and principles of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.' As observed in the information note for the session, the latest escalation of tension came about 'when, on 13 November 2020, Moroccan forces entered the buffer strip of Al-Guerguerat to dismiss Polisario protesters,' promoting the POLISARIO Front representing the SADR to announce that the incident involved violation of the ceasefire and marked an end to the ceasefire including Military Agreement 1.

In addition to these recent political and security concerns, the information note for the session identifies three issues relating to the situation. One of these is the humanitarian situation in the region, which has become a cause for heightened concern, especially in light of outbreak of covid-19 pandemic and humanitarian aid reduction. PSC is expected to express concern in that regard and appeal to the international community to mobilise support to address the humanitarian situation, particularly the plight of refugees in the region.

According to the information note for the session, the other issue is Illegal exploitation of natural resources by people who are not of Saharawi origin. In this respect, the information note states that, 'Western Sahara, as non-self-governing territory ought to have its natural resources protected for the benefit of its own people, and the international community ought therefore to ensure this protection.' The third area of concern is the human rights situation in the territory. On this as well, the information note states that 'the situation of human rights need an independent, impartial and transparent monitoring', while noting that 'efforts to introduce a human rights component in

the mandate of MINURSO have so far failed.'

Although it is a matter that falls within the mandate of the PSC, this is one of the most politically contentious issues. It is to be recalled that the AU Assembly at its July 2018 summit in Nouakchott decided to entrust the follow up of this issue to 'an African mechanism comprising the AU Troika, namely the outgoing, the current and the incoming Chairpersons, as well as the Chairperson of the Commission, to extend effective support to the UN efforts'. As noted in the information note for this session, several efforts for convening of the inaugural AU Meeting of the Troika Mechanism on Western Sahara on the sidelines of the AU Summits in 2019 and 2020 'were never successful because of pressing commitments of the members and the attempt to have the meeting in February 2021 on the margins of the 34th ordinary session 'was cancelled, again due to the non-availability of the other Troika members.'

Tomorrow's session accordingly comes against the background of not only the emergence of new escalation of tension threatening the 1991 ceasefire but also such lack of progress to launch the Troika Mechanism of the July 2018 decision of the AU Assembly. Despite the fact that positions of relevant actors seem to remain entrenched, this session could thus serve as an opportunity for both salvaging the 1991 ceasefire and to create conditions for finding lasting solution for the situation. It remains to be seen whether this session will craft a process for a more active engagement on this issue and the modality for following up on this issue within the framework of the AU.

Within the broad theme of sustainable peace in Africa, the PSC may also discuss some of the most pressing conflict situations and threats to peace and security. This may include country specific conflict situations. It is to be recalled that at its 929th meeting, which had a focus on cessation of hostilities within the context of COVID-19, the PSC addressed itself to

the conflict in northern Mozambique.

The outcome document of the session could be adopted in the form of a communiqué. In addition, the outcome of the first agenda item is expected to summarise key policy recommendations on opportunities, mechanisms and partnerships for sustaining peace. With respect to climate change and peace and security, the PSC may decide to have this as a standing agenda item and request the AU Commission to present report on how climate change affects peace and security in Africa and the ways in which climate issues can be taken into account across the peace and security cycle of the AU including conflict prevention, management, resolution and post conflict reconstruction and development. It could also reiterate previous PSC decisions including those relating to preparedness and funding for climate adaptation. Council is expected to adopt a report highlighting the ways towards operationalising peacebuilding approaches, which would direct current and future initiatives aimed at implementing approaches for sustaining peace. On implementation of paragraph 15 of the Ext/Assembly/AU/Dec.1(XIV), the PSC may express concern about the recent flareup of conflict and call for the need to address 'the causes of the violation of the cease fire and military agreement number one in Guergueret which prompted the resumption of the war'. The PSC may also underscore the need for the protection of the resources of the non-self-governing territory for the benefit of its own people, for the parties to uphold their obligations for protecting human rights and for the international community to address the humanitarian situation. Reference may also be made to the need for the reinvigoration of the engagement of the AU High Representative, to holding consultations for the return of the AU Observer Mission to Laayoune, in order to facilitate operational coordination with the UN and to previous decisions calling on the parties to engage in direct and serious talks without preconditions under the auspices of the AU and the UN.