

The fifth Anniversary of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process

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Tomorrow (26 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold its 933rd session on the 5th Anniversary of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process.

It is expected that PSC members will conduct the meeting through video teleconference. It is expected that AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui will deliver a remark to the Council. Representative of Mali is also expected to make a statement. Presentation will be made by the representative of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which also includes Francis Behanzin, ECOWAS's Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace and Security. Additionally, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary General to Mali and head of MINUSMA is scheduled to deliver a presentation.

This month marks the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali. The main objective of the session is to take stock of the process of implementation of the agreement and strengthen the support to the actors in Mali to speed up the implementation and ownership of the peace agreement. The session is also expected to assess the progress made and the key challenges that have emerged in implementing the peace agreement over the past five years.

There are some gains that have been made from the peace

agreement. Despite the jihadist threat and the mounting political opposition facing President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's government, the agreement helped in stabilizing northern Mali. In the political front, in December 2019 Mali held a national dialogue that resulted in the adoption of four main resolutions. The resolutions primarily called for the holding of legislative elections before May 2020 and constitutional referendum, the redeployment of the restructured armed forces and State administration in the country and a review of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The national dialogue played some positive role in reinfusing some momentum and mobilizing the signatories for the implementation of the peace and reconciliation agreement.

As per the agreement of the national dialogue, the legislative elections were held on 29 March and 19 April. Due to the fear of insecurity and the COVID19 pandemic there was a low turnout. Voters in the two new regions (Ménaka and Taoudenit) created in northern Mali could not choose deputies in the April 2020 legislative elections because the electoral districts had not yet been delineated. Despite the various challenges the elections were held and the country's Constitutional Court has confirmed the results of the legislative elections.

With respect to the parts of the agreement on development (Section IV) and reconciliation (Section V), no major progress registered. As a recent report pointed out, a long-term development fund designed to support initiatives in northern Mali has been set up, but its joint administration by the Malian authorities and armed groups remains a challenge. Mali's truth, justice and reconciliation commission, established in 2014, has continued its role as defined in the 2015 agreement, and it began holding public hearings in December 2019. In terms of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the redeployment of reconstituted forces has taken place in Northern parts of the country.

Yet, major implementation gaps persist. According to the Carter Centre, which was designated as the independent observer in Mali, in 2017, 22 per cent of the agreement's provisions had been put into effect, compared to 23 per cent three years later. As noted in the report of the UN Secretary-General

submitted on 2 June 2020, political actors are still under discussion on setting a timeframe for the constitutional reform, which was expected to take place following the election. It is important to note that the constitutional review, key for the implementation of the political and institutional reform of Mali's system of governance based on devolution and through instituting a senate and regional assemblies whose presidents would be elected through direct universal suffrage, has been postponed since 2017.

Despite the redeployment of reconstituted forces in Northern parts of the country, the parties have as yet to find mutually acceptable effective way of integrating former armed groups' members in the national army and its chain of command. The operationalization of deployed forces requires training and capacity building, which has been delayed due to the COVID19 pandemic. This has affected the disarmament and reintegration process as well.

While the agreement is a critical stepping-stone for the country's stability and remains the only viable peace framework agreement, it however suffers from lack of political commitment for its implementation. Community based organizations in both northern and southern Mali meant to ensure representation of local population were excluded. There are now more public campaigns protesting against the peace agreement than in support of it. For the PSC, one of the key issues of interest in respect of which members may seek insights from the briefers is the apparent lack of sense of ownership of the peace agreement even among the signatories and how this can be addressed.

Apart from issues internal to the peace process, there are other issues that have adverse impact on the peace agreement as well. The heightening political opposition and tension in Bamako is one such factor. On 5 June, a major opposition protest was staged with protesters calling for the resignation of President Kieta. In a sign of the protest movement gaining steam, further protests involving large group of people took place on 19 June. Prompted by complaints about the election outcome and the abduction of leading opposition leader Soumaila Cisse while campaigning ahead of the parliamentary election in March. On 22 June, AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, issued a statement expressing 'deep concern' about 'the serious crisis that has plagued Mali since the popular protest on June 5, 2020'. The other factor which also contributes to the political instability is the security situation. Currently, the overall security situation in Mali and the Sahel region remains worrying. Terrorism and inter-communal clashes are still prevalent. The impact of the pandemic on restriction of movement has also enabled terrorist groups to utilize the security vacuum to make advances and attack civilians and security forces. As indicated in the Secretary General report over the past three months alone a total of 169 civilians were killed.

The compounded effects of socio-economic challenges, weak state control, and protracted violence and conflict exacerbated by the impact of means that the humanitarian situation continues to be dire. There are close to 200,000 Malian refugees taking refuge in neighbouring countries and about 250,000 are internally displaced.

Thus, the fifth anniversary of the agreement is taking place in a midst of a number of political upheavals and security challenges putting the peace agreement at peril. It would be of interest for the PSC to review how to maintain the peace process and retain the gains made and how it may also contribute working with ECOWAS and the UN towards addressing

the multifaceted challenges inhibiting progress.

It is to be recalled that the worsening of the security situation has resulted in the decision of the AU Summit in February 2020 to deploy the Joint Multinational Task Force (JMTF) with 3000 troops for six months, in order to further degrade terrorist groups in the Sahel by supporting the G5 Sahel and working closely with ECOWAS. Although the details of the JMTF are still being developed and this force, when deployed, can contribute towards stemming the expansion of terrorism in the region, it is debatable if the further militarization of the country and the region is what the situation in Mali warrants.

Tomorrow's session is also taking place ahead of the UNSC session on United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the situation in Mali. Before the end of this month the UNSC is also expected to hold a session to renew the mandate of MINUSMA, which expires on 30 June. UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019) extended the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June with the capacity of 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police personnel.

In the same resolution the Security Council urged for the swift and strengthened implementation of the agreement noting of the delays created in the earlier years of agreement. Additionally, before the end of the current mandate of MINUSMA, among other it urged Malian political actors to complete of the constitutional reform and the transfer of decentralized State services to local authorities, resolve pending issues related to the concept of reconstituted and reformed Malian national forces. In the briefing to the PSC, the head of MINUSMA is expected to inform the PSC about these issues and the contribution of MINUSMA to the peace process in Mali, including in supporting the DDR process. The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may welcome the gains registered in Mali with respect to the peace agreement. It may

particularly welcome the successful conclusion of the national dialogue and the legislative election as well as the deployment of a reconstituted Malian army battalion in February 2020 in Kidal. It may urge the government to adopt a more inclusive and consultative approach in implementing the agreement. It may also underscore the imperative for the signatories to assume their full responsibilities under the peace agreement and take full ownership for its implementation on the basis of firm political will and active mobilization public support. The PSC may in particular urge the government and all Malian political forces to create the conditions for the convening of the constitutional referendum as reaffirmed in the outcome of the December 2019 national dialogue. The PSC may

also welcome the statement of the AU Commission Chairperson and reiterate his call for the parties to work together to find consensual solutions to end the political crisis following the June 5 public protests. It may also express concern over the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the country, which continue to undermine the gains made so far and the efficacy of the peace agreement. It may condemn the abduction of Soumaila Cisse and urge the government to strengthen efforts for his immediate release. It may call on the international community to strengthen their efforts, including on the basis of benchmarks and processes of support jointly crafted by Mali and the guarantors of the peace agreement, in bringing lasting peace and stability in the region by ensuring the complete implementation of the agreement.