

# Update on Operationalisation of ASF

**Update on Operationalisation of ASF** Date | 01 December 2022

Tomorrow (01 December), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1124<sup>th</sup> session to receive updates on the status of operationalisation of the African Standby Force (ASF) and Regional Standby Forces.

Following opening remarks of the Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Victor Adekunle Adeleke, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to deliver a statement. The various Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) are also expected to provide updates to the PSC regarding on-going efforts to enhance Regional Standby Brigades.

The last time PSC met to follow up on the operationalisation of the ASF was at its 1069<sup>th</sup> session held on 10 March 2022. The session served to discuss capacity gaps that continue to constrain the deployment and employment of the ASF which has been declared fully operational by the Specialized Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security (STCDSS) in 2015. Tomorrow's session serves to reflect on the status of some of the steps necessitated for the full deployment of ASF, particularly finalisation and adoption of key documents including the Five-Year Successor Strategic Work Plan (2021 – 2025) on the ASF and the AU-RECs/RMs Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Employment of the ASF.

Following the 1069<sup>th</sup> PSC session, the STCDSS convened its 14<sup>th</sup>

Ordinary Session on 12 May 2022 where it considered both the 2021 – 2025 Strategic Work Plan and the AU-RECs/RMs MoU. The 2021 – 2025 Strategic Work Plan was developed by the AU Commission, following completion of the implementation period of the 2016 – 2020 Maputo Strategic Five-Year Work Plan. The new work plan which has been developed through a review process of the previous one including achievements and challenges observed in its implementation, aims to align all ASF policies with the AU Doctrine on Peace Support Operations (PSOs) which was adopted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Extraordinary Meeting of the STCDSS held on 30 January 2021. Following the STCDSS's review at its 14<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, the draft 2021 – 2025 Strategic Work Plan was shared with the RECs/RMs for final inputs and validation. One area the PSC could be updated on at tomorrow's session is therefore the status of validation of the new strategic work plan by RECs/RMs.

Regarding the AU-RECs/RMs MoU on the employment of ASF, a key development has been the finalisation of the draft MoU – which defined the roles and responsibilities of the AU and RECs/RMs in the employment, deployment and post-employment of the ASF composed of regional standby forces – and its clearance by the AU Office of Legal Counsel. Having considered the draft, the STCDSS at its 14<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session requested the AU to form a Working Group comprising representatives of AU, RECs/RMs and member States, to undertake further consultations and provide inputs on the MoU. Accordingly, a Working Group meeting was facilitated by the AU Commission from 24 to 26 October 2022 and a consensus document representing additional inputs from member States and RECs/RMs was produced. The STCDSS Bureau has tabled the AU-RECs/RMs MoU as an agenda item of its 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary meeting scheduled to take place in May or June 2023. Tomorrow's session also serves for the PSC to be updated of these developments regarding the MoU.

With regards to ASF capacity generation, it is to be recalled

that the AU Commission Chairperson's "Status Report/Roadmap on the Full Operationalisation of the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Continental Logistics Base (CLB)" that was submitted to the 1007<sup>th</sup> PSC session highlighted 'hesitancy and reluctance by the RECs/RMs to confirm capabilities pledged and how they are to be made readily available'. Demonstrating the continuation of the challenge, it was noted by the PSC at its 1069<sup>th</sup> session that only the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF) Secretariat provided a verification report upon the request of the AU Commission in July 2021, for RECs/RMs to verify their pledged capabilities using the 2019 ASF Pledged Capabilities Verification Guidelines. In addition to seeking update on the submission of verification reports by any of the other RECs/RMs, PSC may be interested in examining the specific challenges faced by respective RECs/RMs in completing the reports.

The other aspect in the operationalization of the ASF expected to be discussed tomorrow concerns the development of the Continental Movement Coordination Centre (CMCC) and Strategic Lift capability. The PSC may take note of initiatives of the AU Commission in assessing the strategic lift assets of AU member states that have pledged air capabilities (Chad, Gabon, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cote D'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea) and the submission of draft MoUs in this regard, to the AU Office of Legal Counsel for clearance. This is expected to pave the way for the utilisation of the pledged assets whenever the need arises.

Another important aspect of ASF operationalisation that may draw PSC's attention is the status of utilisation of the Continental Logistics Base (CLB) which was launched in January 2018 and is based in Doula, Cameroon. The CLB, which serves the main purpose facilitating procurement and delivery of equipment as well as accounting for necessary support to the civilian, police and military components of AU PSOs, has been put to use for storing and managing equipment for PSOs

including some donated to the South African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and to the Multinational Joint Task Force against the Boko Haram (MNJTF). Despite its important utility, the CLB faces challenges which could seriously hinder its operations. For example, since its inauguration in 2018, the CLB has been functioning through officers seconded by AU member States as there is shortage of funding for recruitment of substantive staff and to cover operating costs. In addition, there is still challenge in ensuring appropriate storage and maintenance facilities as well as comprehensive security to the equipment. On the other hand, the approval of the CLB structure through the AU Executive Council Decision adopted at its 41<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Session held on 14 July 2022 [[EX.CL/Dec.1168\(XLI\)](#)] has been an important progress.

Coming in the wake of the Inaugural Lessons Learned Forum on AU PSOs and ASF which took place from 01 to 03 November 2022, in Abuja, Nigeria, tomorrow's session may also serve the PSC to take stock of and reflect on some of the main outcomes of the forum. One important point that formed part of the discussions at the Abuja lessons learned forum was the importance of reconceptualising the ASF as to align its visions of being continentally coordinated, with current practices and realities on the ground, particularly the more proactive role played by RECs/RMs in the deployment and management of PSOs. Despite some encouraging development being obtained in utilising the ASF framework, particularly through the deployment of SAMIM and SADC Preventive Mission in Lesotho (SAPMIL), the practice of deploying PSOs by RECs/RMs and some ad-hoc security arrangements has largely remained outside of, and mostly without any references to, the ASF framework.

The decision of the 14<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Assembly on Silencing the Guns to declare the full operationalisation of ASF and direct its utilisation in mandating and authorising AU PSOs has been significant to address this gap. However, if the

recent deployment of East African Community (EAC) Regional Force to Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – which makes no reference to the ASF framework – is to be any indication, the challenge still persists. Further to reconceptualising the ASF in a manner that grasps practices on the ground in the deployment of PSOs, it is thus important to also have clarity on some key strategic and political issues such as mandating deployment, political decision-making, and command and control, issues which will require the conclusion and signing of the AU-RECs/RMs MoU to be fully clarified.

An important point emphasised at the Abuja lessons learned forum was also the critical role that can be played by a well-funded ASF to tackle the growing challenge of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa, and the importance of unpacking previous and on-going counterterrorism operations such as AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and MNJTF to draw lessons for the deployment of continental responses to terrorism, through the ASF. Although the decision for the establishment of a Specialised Unit of the ASF on Counterterrorism has been made pursuant to the Communiqués of PSC's 455<sup>th</sup> and 960<sup>th</sup> sessions and decision of the AU Assembly [[Assembly/AU/Dec.815\(XXXV\)](#)], its envisaged establishment and utilisation – upon request by the affected member State and RECs/RMs and approval by the PSC – is yet to be realised. Funding being one of the main constraints delaying establishment of the unit, it remains critical to explore all options including utilisation of the AU Peace Fund, which envisages under Window 3, dedication of funds for full operationalisation of ASF.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is unknown at the time of developing this insight. The PSC may welcome the inauguration of a lessons learned forum on AU PSOs and the ASF in Abuja and encourage its periodic and regular convening in the future. It may also welcome developments made since its last session, in the process of fully operationalising the ASF. It may particularly take note of advances made in

finalising key documents including the 2021 – 2025 Strategic Work Plan of the ASF and the AU-RECs/RMs MoU and urge the AU Commission to closely follow up on the status of their adoption. It may particularly encourage member States to adopt the draft AU-RECs/RMs MoU taking into account that it represents consensus of the members of the Working Group assigned by the STCDSS. Having regard to the importance of reconceptualising the ASF, the PSC may request the AU Commission to develop a revised ASF Concept that takes full account of RECs/RMs ownership of their respective standby forces, and submit to the 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting of the STCDSS in May/June 2023. It may further request the 36<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly to endorse the CLB structure which has already been approved by the 41<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Session of the Executive Council. It may urge RECs/RMs that have not yet done so, to submit reports verifying their pledged capabilities. It may further commend RECs/RMs that have attained their full operational capability (FOC) and encourage those RECs/RMs that are yet to achieve FOC, to scale up the capabilities of their Regional Standby Brigades and work towards operationalising their respective Regional Logistic Depots. In this regard, considering also the experience of SADC in terms of non-readiness of the depot for supporting the SADC Mission in Mozambique, the PSC may further request the AU Commission to provide the necessary support to RECs/RMs in their efforts to enhance their capacities. While commending member States that have pledged strategic lift capabilities for rapid deployment, the PSC may call on the AU Office of Legal Counsel to finalise clearance for ensuring readiness of the legal parameters for utilizing the capabilities. The PSC may also take note of capacity challenges that confront the CLB as well as establishment of the ASF Specialised Unit on Counterterrorism and call on all relevant stakeholders to redouble efforts to obtain the necessary funding as well as other support to address these challenges.