

Update on the Situation in Mali

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Tomorrow (14 January), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to receive updates on the situation in Mali as one of the agenda items of its 1057th session, which was added to the monthly program after the adoption of the program.

Following the opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Ghana to the AU, Amma A. Twum-Amoah, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a presentation. The AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, Maman Sambo Sidikou is also expected to make remarks. Statements are also expected from representatives of Algeria, Mauritania, Ghana (as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Chair), and United Nations Office to the AU (UNOAU). Mali as a country concerned may provide a statement. It is expected that one of the issues that will be highlighted is the need for ensuring that measures taken against Mali will not interfere with the 2015 peace agreement and further aggravate the security challenges of Mali.

The session comes following the fourth Extraordinary Session of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government convened on 9 January 2022 where in addition to deciding to uphold the previous sanctions, the regional bloc imposed additional sanctions against Mali and the transition authorities, including closure of land and air borders between Mali and other ECOWAS countries. ECOWAS's decision was based on the inability of Mali's transition authorities to adhere to the 2020 Transitional Charter which limits the transition period to 18 months. Ahead of the summit, Mali presented a proposal to

ECOWAS, which the ECOWAS mediator Goodluck Jonathan indicated would not be endorsed by ECOWAS.

Tomorrow's session is expected to consider the latest developments in Mali in the context of the decision of the Extraordinary Session of ECOWAS. It is to be recalled that the PSC at its 1001st session endorsed the decision of ECOWAS on Mali and called upon the transitional authorities to respect the initially set 18 months transition period. The PSC has further called for the immediate return of the military to the barracks, for a swift civilian led transition, for the unconditional respect of the transitional charter and to ensure that the current leadership of the transition does not participate in the planned election.

Despite the repeated calls by ECOWAS, the PSC and other international partners to adhere to the 2020 Transitional Charter and despite earlier promises by Mali's transition authority to conduct elections by February 2022, a new transition calendar was adopted by the end of December 2021, scheduling the elections for December 2026 and extending the transition period for additional five years.

As highlighted in the report of PSC's Evaluation Mission to Mali conducted in July 2021, there was already lack of concrete agreement on the establishment of an independent election management body or maintaining the prevailing system of having three institutions to manage the elections. According to the draft electoral law adopted by the Council of Ministers on 24 November 2021, a single election management body is to be established although the process for establishing this organ may be lengthy, a concern already stressed by various Malian stakeholders earlier on as captured in the report of PSC's Evaluation mission.

Moreover, despite repeated calls from ECOWAS and PSC, Mali's current transition authorities have refrained from declaring that they will not be taking part in elections at the end of

the transition period. The transition process has also been criticised for lack of inclusivity. For instance, reports indicate that despite the participation of substantial number of citizens at the national dialogue – the “National Refoundation Conference” – conducted from 11 to 30 December 2021 which ended with the recommendation to extend Mali’s transition period anywhere from six months to five years, some key regions were not represented, notably Kidal and Ménaka. Moreover, the Cadre d’échange (“Exchange Framework”), a political coalition involving allies of the former presidential majority, not only boycotted the national dialogue claiming “erosion of trust between the transitional government and political parties”, but also voiced clear opposition against the new transition calendar and the extension of the transition period implied therein.

Both ECOWAS and the PSC – notably the PSC at its 1001st session – have underscored the need for holding a national dialogue and urged the transition authorities to coordinate an inclusive national reconciliation and dialogue process. The December 2021 “National Refoundation Conference” was conducted after two postponements. Nonetheless, the dialogue came up with some solid positive outcomes, including recommendations for the creation of a Senate, the acceleration of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process and a constitutional review.

Malian authorities rejected the decision of ECOWAS and have called upon people in the country and diaspora to participate in protests on Friday 14 January, alongside calls for prayer sessions in places of worship, declaring their decision to ‘safeguard our sovereignty’. A key development in the region that followed ECOWAS’s additional sanctions against Mali was Guinea’s announcement that it is in no way associated with the decision and that it will keep its borders with Mali open, going against ECOWAS’s decision. Guinea, having undergone a coup of its own on 5 September 2021, is currently undergoing a

transition period marred with its own challenges and as a member of ECOWAS, is under sanctions imposed by the regional bloc. On the other hand, in the Communiqué of its 4th Extraordinary Session, ECOWAS has called for non-ECOWAS member States neighbouring Mali, particularly Algeria and Mauritania to support the implementation of its decisions. Algeria and Mauritania, both expected to be represented at tomorrow's PSC session may therefore express their positions in that regard.

The UN Security Council on its part considered the situation in Mali and a draft statement on Mali initiated by France on 11 January 2022. Kenya's Permanent Representative to the UN stated that the A3+1 firmly backed the tough ECOWAS decision on Mali, while welcoming the assurance the sanctions imposed will not impede the import of humanitarian air, essential consumer goods, medicines, medical equipment and the operations of UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Despite the support by the A3 and other members of the Council including UK and US for the draft statement initiated by France, the adoption of the draft statement was blocked by Russia and China. Russia underscored at the meeting that it recognises and understands the challenges faced by Malian authorities in organising the general elections as explanation for its position against endorsing ECOWAS's sanctions. It is known that the involvement of the Russian private military company, the Wagner Group in Mali has been causing tension between Russia on the one hand and other members of the UN Security Council, notably France, UK and US.

On the security front, insurgency and intercommunal violence continue to destabilise the country, with an increasing trend in the usage of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Militant attacks targeted against civilians and MINUSMA forces have continued to claim the lives of many. At its 1027th session where it considered the report of the PSC evaluation mission to Mali, Council encouraged the transition authorities to

accelerate implementation of the 2015 Algiers Agreement, particularly the deployment of the Reconstituted Army Battalions (BATFAR) which could contribute in filling some security vacuum that could result from the withdrawal of France's forces. To evaluate the threat on the ground, the AU Commission was also requested to conduct an assessment at Council's 1027th session. Tomorrow's session therefore presents the opportunity for Council to follow up on the progress of the assessment.

The humanitarian situation in Mali also continues to deteriorate. According to the UN, "more than 1.8 million people are expected to need food assistance in 2022 compared to 1.3 million in 2021, the highest level of food insecurity recorded since 2014". The UN has also recorded a considerable increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mali, from 216,000 to over 400,000 in just one year. Despite the worsening circumstances, there hasn't been sufficient humanitarian assistance in Mali, with a very limited amount of funding received in the past year as emphasised by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the country.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a Communiqué. Council is expected to express grave concern over the prolonged extension of the transition period, going against the terms of the PSC communique of its 1001st session. The PSC may reiterate its earlier calls for the need for upholding constitutional rule and respecting the terms of the transitional charter that sets the parameters for return to constitutional order. It may also endorse the decision of the 4th Extraordinary Session of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government and may appeal to the transitional authorities to work with ECOWAS to address the outstanding areas of difference with a view for facilitating the return of Mali to constitutional order within a short period of time. The PSC may also call on its member States to support the efforts of

ECOWAS and the ECOWAS mediator, former Nigerian President Goodluck Johnathan. Council may also appeal to the international community to provide assistance to respond to the grave humanitarian situation in Mali. Welcoming the convening of the national dialogue, the Council may also urge Mali's transition authorities to take forward and ensure implementation of outcomes such as the recommendation for accelerating DDR processes while complying with the transitional charter and the various communiques of the PSC. It may also reiterate the importance of the 2015 peace agreement and the need to ensure and provide full support for its implementation.