

Update on the situation in Sudan

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Today (16 May), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1154th session to receive update on the situation in Sudan as one of the two agenda items tabled for consideration.

Opening remarks are expected by Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Permanent Representative of Uganda to the AU and PSC Chairperson for the month of May while Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to brief members of the PSC.

Today's session will be the second time that the PSC has met to discuss the situation in Sudan since the outbreak of fighting on 15 April between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. On 16 April, the PSC convened emergency session, which condemned the armed confrontation and called for an immediate ceasefire by the two parties. While the communique tasked the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, to undertake peacemaking initiatives, it also requested the Chairperson to continue engagement, within the framework of the Trilateral Mechanism (AU-IGAD-UN), with the UN Secretary-General and IGAD Executive Secretary towards a consolidated response by the international community.

It was in that context that Faki convened on 20 April an urgent special ministerial meeting with bilateral, regional, and international actors, including UN Secretary-General, IGAD Executive Secretary, neighboring countries, Gulf countries, and some members of UN Security Council. The ministerial

meeting asked the Trilateral Mechanism – under the leadership of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and in coordination with the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Troika and bilateral actors – to ‘immediately engage the leadership of SAF and the RSF’ for de-escalation and securing permanent ceasefire arrangements. In his briefing, Bankole is expected to update members of the PSC on the evolving situation in Sudan and the various diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

Fighting has continued between the SAF and RSF mainly in the capital Khartoum as the conflict marked one month since its eruption on 15 April. The ongoing conflict not only raises the specter of full-blown civil war in the country but also its implication could go far and wide with the possibility of spilling into neighboring countries that are grappling with their own crisis.

Civilians are bearing the devastating brunt of the conflict as densely populated urban areas are turned into battlefield. Although accurate figures are hard to come by, Sudan’s Ministry of Health data indicates that the conflict killed at least 676 people and injured 5,576 between 15 April and 11 May. According to OCHA’s 14 May update, more than 936,000 people have been newly displaced by the conflict, with around 736,200 people displaced internally and about 200,000 people crossing into neighboring countries. The exodus from Sudan into the neighboring countries prompted the Chairperson of the AU Commission to issue a statement on 27 April, appealing to these countries and the international community to ‘speedily extend humanitarian support to civilians fleeing the conflict’ and ‘facilitate the transit and safety of civilians crossing their borders without impediment’. Millions are still stranded in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country, facing severe shortages of basic necessities such as water and electricity. The World Food Programme (WFP) warned that ‘the crisis in Sudan is likely to plunge millions more into hunger in the coming days and repercussions will be felt across the region’.

WFP further expects that some 19 million people are bound to face acute food insecurity in the next three to six months if the fighting continues.

The other aspect of Bankole's briefing is expected to be on the various diplomatic efforts that seek to broker cessation of hostilities and where such initiatives currently stand. There have been many attempts to secure humanitarian ceasefire, including the initiatives of AU Commission's ministerial session and IGAD's lead mediator, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir Mayardit. The warring parties have reportedly failed to observe the ceasefire in almost each case despite expressing their intention to abide by the commitment for temporary pause in fighting. (For details on the various initiatives for cessation of hostilities, see Amani Africa's recently launched [tracker of diplomatic efforts on Sudan conflict](#)).

The pre-negotiation talks between the representatives of SAF and RSF, which was facilitated by Saudi Arabia and US, culminated in the signing of the 'Declaration of Commitment to Protect Civilians of Sudan' on 11 May, in which the parties affirmed their commitment to ensure protection of civilians, respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law, facilitate the rapid and unimpeded humanitarian relief, and that these commitments are fully disseminated within their ranks. The Trilateral Mechanism, in a statement issued on 11 May, welcomed the signing of the Declaration as an 'important first step toward alleviating human suffering and protecting the lives and dignity of civilians in Sudan', further urging the two parties to translate the commitments to meaningful action on the ground. However, it has not changed neither the course of the conflict nor the behavior of the actors.

Perhaps, one of the issues worth discussing in the session is how best the AU could maintain the leadership role in finding peaceful solutions to the conflict as the PSC envisages in its

last meeting on Sudan. Experiences so far suggest not only the presence of plethora of diplomatic initiatives by various actors but also lack of coordination among these initiatives. Despite the already existing mechanism to coordinate efforts among AU, IGAD, and UN (the Trilateral Mechanism), these regional and international actors do not appear to fully utilize the Mechanism. This was evident for instance when IGAD's 16 April extraordinary summit formed a high-level delegation under the leadership of President Salva Kiir while the PSC tasked the Chairperson of the AU Commission to lead peacemaking initiatives. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and US initiated a 'pre-negotiation talks' in Jeddah at a time when IGAD's lead mediator has been requesting the warring parties to send their representatives to an 'agreed venue' to start the peace talks. Indeed, South Africa, in a statement issued on 8 May to welcome the start of Saudi Arabia/US facilitated talks, stressed the imperative of the 'centrality of the African Union and IGAD in the pre-negotiation and subsequent talks.' The uncoordinated and parallel diplomatic efforts could create the risk of forum shopping, not to mention the possibility of compromising actors' leverage over the warring parties.

The other important issue is the importance of not losing sight on the disrupted political negotiations towards the formation of a civilian government. While the conflict has shifted the focus towards bringing the warring parties to a negotiating table, there is a high need not only to engage the civilian actors in Sudan but also the talks to secure ceasefire should be conceived within the broader picture of establishing a civilian government in Sudan.

Today's session is also likely to deliberate on how the AU could maintain its leadership role in Sudan's peace talks. In that regard, Amani Africa's recent opinion piece '[Ideas Indaba](#)' on Sudan conflict suggested various measures, including for the AU, along with other relevant actors

(notably IGAD and UN), to extensively engage various Sudanese stakeholders such as civilian actors; initiate humanitarian diplomacy; put in place interdisciplinary emergency taskforce on Sudan that tracks the fighting as well as violations; hold regular press conference and briefings on developments in Sudan; engage neighboring and other countries not only to refrain from being drawn into the conflict but also contribute to end the fighting.

The expected outcome of today's session is a communique. Echoing the statement of the Trilateral Mechanism, the PSC may welcome the signing of the Declaration of Commitment to Protect Civilians of Sudan as a step in the right direction to alleviate the human suffering in the country. Despite the signing of the Declaration, the PSC is expected to express its concern over the ongoing conflict and in that regard, it may urge the two parties to use the signing of the Declaration as a steppingstone into a comprehensive ceasefire talks. In light of the unfolding humanitarian crisis, the PSC may reiterate the call of the Chairperson of the AU Commission for neighboring countries to facilitate the transit and safety of civilians crossing their borders and the international community to step up the delivery of humanitarian assistance. PSC may stress the importance of coordinating diplomatic efforts to end the conflict in Sudan, and in that connection, it may request the Chairperson of the AU Commission to replicate the experience of his convening of a special ministerial meeting on the situation in Sudan. Given the gravity of the crisis and its potential implication on the peace and stability of the broader region and the continent, the PSC may highlight the need for more frequent engagement on the situation in Sudan.