

VTC briefing on the Situation in Darfur and the activities of UNAMID

Automatic Heading TextDate | 21 May, 2020

Tomorrow (21 May) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to receive a briefing on the situation in Darfur and the activities of UNAMID. Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and Jeremiah Nyamane Kingsley Mamabolo, the Joint Special Representative and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) are expected to brief the Council. Representative of Sudan is also expected to make a statement.

The briefing is expected to take place via video teleconference (VTC).

It is to be recalled that in October 2019 the UN Security Council (UNSC) had decided to extend UNAMID's mandate for one year through resolution 2495 (2019). In the same resolution the UNSC also decided that the mission would maintain its current troop and police levels until 31 March 2020. However, on 30 March 2020 due to the current spread of COVID19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions on movement, the UNSC decided to extend the date to 31 May 2020 and for UNAMID to maintain all team sites for mandate implementation.

Stressing that UNAMID remains a joint deployment of the AU and the UN, the PSC, during its last meeting on UNAMID on 3 March 2020, has particularly underlined the need for UNAMID drawdown and its follow up mechanism to maintain this hybrid nature and the importance of the joint engagement until the end of the mandate. Accordingly, during tomorrow's session the PSC is expected to deliberate on the various developments including the political and security situation in Darfur and broadly in

Sudan, the spread of the pandemic and their impact on the operations and the drawdown of UNAMID. The session is also taking place ahead of the UNSC meeting that is expected to take place around the end of the month to adopt a resolution establishing a follow-on presence that takes the place of UNAMID after 31 May. Hence it will be a critical session to inform the decisions at the upcoming meeting.

The political situation in Sudan remains tense. The 9 March attack on the convoy of Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was a clear indication of the continuous internal power struggle between the various factions of the transitional government. The peace talks between the transitional government of Sudan and opposition armed groups have also experienced some challenges. Agreement is yet to be reached with the SPLM-N faction led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu. The Darfur track has also experienced some delays and resistance from the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) to join the process. As noted by the head of UN Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix in a briefing to UNSC on 24 April, inter-communal clashes have persisted, underscoring the importance of peacebuilding interventions that go beyond peace processes.

It is expected that PSC will receive update from Chergui on how the AU can enhance support to the transitional process in Sudan and the follow up from the AU on the PSC's 913th session on UNAMID. During a discussion that the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security held with Prime Minister Hamdok earlier in the month, he stated that the AU and the UN will jointly play an integral role post-UNAMID. Another issue to be addressed is how the AU enhance its role rallying African and international support for the economic recovery of the country, which is crucial for the stability of the power sharing government and the transitional process.

It will be important for tomorrow's session to deliberate on AU's role in the follow-on mechanism post- UNAMID. In the joint report prepared by the AU Chairperson and UN Secretary

General in March measures were identified by taking in consideration the request made by Prime Minister Hamdok through two letters submitted to the Secretary General. The letter submitted on 27 January calls for the reconfiguration of the UN presence and for the establishment of a Chapter VI peace support operation in the form of a special political mission. The second letter sent a month later requested the UN's support in peace negotiations among the Sudanese parties as well as assistance with mobilising economic and development and humanitarian aid.

Based on the request the report identified four core objectives for a post-UNAMID presence in the Sudan: (a) To support achievement of the political benchmarks in the Constitutional Declaration, including the preparations towards the Constitution and elections; (b) To support implementation of peace agreements in the conflict-affected areas, including security arrangements, such as ceasefire monitoring and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, if required, and accountability and transitional justice; (c) To support national-led peacebuilding and the strengthening of human rights and rule of law institutions, and the scaling-up of support for recovery and development to build resilience and mitigate protection risks; (d) To facilitate international support for economic reform that would set the country on a path to sustainable development.

For the realization of these objectives the report articulates a number of principles. The one on the continued partnership between the AU and UN will be of particular interest to the PSC. The report recognizes the role the PSC has played through landmark decisions in 2019 to deter military seizure of power. And also noted the interest demonstrated by some Sudanese stakeholders on the potential role of the AU as a guarantor of a peace agreement.

In this context, an issue of particular importance for the PSC is how to provide political guidance on how to elevate AU's

strategic engagement and presence in post- UNAMID period.

Tomorrow's briefing is also the first the PSC will be considering the situation in Darfur and UNAMID in the context of COVID19. Sudan has the highest case of confirmed cases with close to 3000. Due to the existing vulnerabilities in regions such as Darfur, it is feared that the impact of the pandemic will be devastating. The PSC may particularly focus on the effects of the pandemic on the safety and livelihood of vulnerable communities that will be disproportionately affected by the pandemic. A large community that continues to be displaced by conflicts does not have access to regular and timely life saving information and the necessary tools to fight the pandemic. Ongoing clashes and fighting as well as the restriction on movement also deter the provision of humanitarian assistance. In this context the PSC is expected to pronounce itself on the need to pay particular attention to vulnerable groups in Darfur and it may urge all political actors to make efforts in combatting the pandemic.

COVID-19 has brought a lot of uncertainty worldwide. In the Sudan case, it has brought about more socio-economic stress to an already economically challenged transitional process under way in the country. It is a difficult task to prepare timeline and actions in this current context. Nonetheless, it will be important for the Council to assess the implication of the pandemic on the security situation and political process of the country to ensure that emerging challenges are addressed amicably.

The expected outcome is communiqué. The PSC may particularly express concern over the current pandemic and its impact on the most vulnerable section of the people. During this critical time it may reiterate the need for cessation of hostilities and may in particular urge the Government and opposition armed groups to redouble their efforts in the negotiation process. It may in particular call on Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) and the SPLM-N faction

led by Abdelaziz al- Hilu to join the respective peace processes pertaining to Darfur and the two areas. With regards to the follow-on mechanism, it is expected that the PSC will reiterate the communique of its 913th session on the need for maintaining the hybrid character of both the process of the drawdown and the make-up of the post-UNAMID as a means of both securing the gains made through the joint mission and leveraging effectively the comparative advantage of the AU in supporting the transitional process in Sudan. In the light of inter-ethnic clashes and concerns around COVID19 including its impact on UNAMID, the PSC may urge closer collaboration between UNAMID and the Sudan Government to support local peacebuilding efforts. Regarding the transitional process, the PSC will urge the members of the power sharing agreement that established the transitional government to sustain the spirit of cooperation and consultation in the implementation of the transitional agenda and in addressing emerging issues.