

VTC BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN THE SUDAN

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Tomorrow (17 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to consider the situation in the Sudan. The meeting is scheduled to take place through video teleconference. The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui, is expected to make a statement. The PSC is also expected to receive a presentation from the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission (SRCC) to Sudan, Mohammed Belaich. Representatives of Sudan, as concerned country, and Niger, as the coordinator of the Africa three (A3) non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), are also expected to make statement.

In order to support the transition in Sudan, it is to be recalled that the PSC requested the Chairperson of the AU Commission to regularly brief the Council on the situation, in particular, on the implementation of the Political Agreement and the Constitutional Document. It has been a year since former President Omar Al-Bashir was ousted from power and barely a month is also left for the first anniversary of the political agreement reached between Sudanese political stakeholders on the establishment of a transitional government, which will last for 39 months.

Tomorrow's meeting will afford members the opportunity to review the progress and challenges in implementing the agreement over the past one year and exchange views on ways and means of assisting Sudan in this arduous transition process. This discussion will, of course, take place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has so far infected more than five thousand Sudanese and killed more than 300 of them, according to data compiled by the Africa CDC.

Sudan is one of the most affected countries in the Eastern Africa region and the pandemic is impacting the country by further compounding its multiple and complex socio-economic and political challenges.

Despite some positive steps taken including the launching of a peace process and the adoption of economic recovery plan, however, Sudan remains mired in deep seated problems.

The first of these challenges relate to the economy. The transitional government has inherited a very weak economy suffering from the nearly \$60 billion debt burden, widespread unemployment and rising inflation and cost of living. With very little tools at its disposal for addressing the plethora of economic woes facing the country, Sudan needs major external economic support. Prime Minister Abdela Hamdok says the country requires up to \$10 billion to stabilize the currency and help the administration tackle key challenges over the next two years. Without getting the much-needed relief, things could likely get worse, thus further weakening an already precarious state of the transitional government. The country also faces a pressure of lifting subsidies, which can further compound the economic woes facing the general public. Lifting subsidies at this point in time could trigger social unrest and instability.

Related to the economy is the issue of the removal by the US of Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. This has been considered as one of the major stumbling blocks for the country in rehabilitating its economy and attracting much needed international financial intervention.

As pointed out in our analysis on the agenda of the session the PSC held in January on this subject, some of the conditions US officials advanced for removing Sudan from the list include: more cooperation on counterterrorism; improved human rights protections, including freedom of religion and the press; increased humanitarian access; ending fighting and conflicts with rebels within Sudan; showing that Sudan has

ceased supporting terrorism, ensuring that no Sudanese weapons in terrorist hands; and compensating those affected by the terrorist incidents for which responsibility is attributed to Sudan.

Since then, while progress has been made on various files including the agreement of Sudan to pay financial compensations to family members of people killed or injured in terrorist attacks in the 1990s, there remain no clear timeline and arrangement for the removal of Sudan from the list.

It is to be recalled that the PSC had called for the lifting of all economic and financial sanctions on Sudan, including removing Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. There is renewed call for the removal of Sudan from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism to allow the country to address its socio-economic difficulties and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apart from the update on the transitional process, during tomorrow's session the representative of Sudan is expected to provide further details on the challenges facing Sudan and what the transitional government is doing to address these. Also, of importance for the PSC is update by the Sudanese representative on whether there is any progress in the discussions between Sudan and the US regarding the removal of Sudan from the list of state sponsor of terrorism.

Another challenge facing the transition relates to the implementation of the transitional activities. In terms of the assembly have as yet to be implemented. This in part has to do with the lack of progress in the peace talks.

The transitional government, which was formed through civilian-military coalition is already fragile and tensions have been simmering underneath the surface. It is against this backdrop that an assassination attempt was made on the life of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdook. In his recent encounter with

the media, Prime Minister Hamdok is said to have acknowledged the challenges in the relationship between the civilian and military components of the power-sharing government. With the military continuing to exert enormous influence and the civilian government lacking enough tools at its disposal, the challenge now is how to keep the transition on track.

During tomorrow's meeting, the SRCC Belaich is expected to provide the PSC update on the progress and challenges in the Sudanese transitional process including the peace talks. Indeed, the peace process is another area of interest for the PSC in the transitional process.

Peace talks with various armed groups have been under way since 14 October 2019 hosted by South Sudan. Despite some progress the parties reported, there remain some important challenges. The first challenge is that the talks are not proceeding as initially planned. Although this process was initially scheduled to be concluded in February, it has since been postponed to June 2020. Second, the parties participating in the talks in Juba have as yet to reach agreement on security arrangements. Third, two armed groups with military presence on the ground, namely Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/AW) Abdul Wahid and Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North, Al-Hilu (SPLM-N-Al Hilu) for the Darfur track and the Two Areas tracks respectively remain outside the peace talks. Additionally, it is feared that the break-up of the Sudan revolutionary Front, a coalition of armed groups, would further complicate the peace talks.

Tomorrow's session is also expected to review the situation relating to the gradual withdrawal of UNAMID and a transition to a peacebuilding mission. This is an issue in respect of which the representative of Niger is expected to provide update to the PSC. The PSC had called for 'extreme caution on the withdrawal of UNAMID, in order to sustain the gains made and to avoid relapse and security vacuum'.

Accordingly, the UNSC adopted resolution 2525 (2020) extending the mandate of UNAMID until 31 December 2020, taking into account the views expressed by the AUPSC. The UNSC also endorsed the creation of the UN Integrated Transitional Assistance Mission to Sudan (UNITAMS). It also requested the UN Secretary-General to continue transition planning and management to ensure a phased, sequenced, and efficient transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS.

Even though this new mission will be a fully-fledged UN special political and peacebuilding mission, it is acknowledged that the role of the AU remains critical. Resolution 2524 also encouraged UNITAMS, UNAMID and the AU to ensure coherence, coordination, and complementarity of their support to Sudan. It also underlined the critical importance of the continued strategic and political partnership between the UN and the AU in Sudan.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. It is expected that the PSC would affirm its support for the transitional government headed by Prime Minister Hamdok and welcome the positive steps taken by the transitional government over the past one year. The PSC may reiterate its call to bilateral and international partners to mobilize assistance in support of the Sudan. In this regard, it may take note of the donor's conference to be jointly hosted by Sudan, Germany and the UN on 25 June to help Sudan raise funds for its economic recovery and development. It may reiterate its call for the lifting of all economic and financial sanctions on Sudan and may in particular urge the US to act with speed for removing Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, with a view to enhancing the economic activities of the country and encouraging foreign investments. The PSC may also encourage the Government of Sudan to continue its effort to ameliorate the economic challenges facing Sudanese and avoid adopting economic measures that may trigger social unrest and instability. The PSC may take note of

resolutions 2524 and 2525 adopted by the UNSC on the deployment of UNITAMS and the extension of the mandate of UNAMID, respectively. It may reaffirm the need for the AU to continue playing an active role in the transition process and enhance its visibility in this regard. The PSC may express concern over the slow progress in negotiation between the transitional government and armed opposition groups and call for renewed efforts with participation of the two armed groups not taking part in the peace talks to facilitate the signing of a comprehensive agreement with all the armed opposition groups to silence the guns in the Sudan and achieve lasting and durable peace in the country.