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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
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BRIEFING NOTE

BRIEFING OF THE PANEL OF THE WISE ON ITS ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Panel of the Wise, one of the pillars of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), is mandated under Article 11 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to support the efforts of the PSC and the Chairperson of the Commission on conflict prevention and on all matters relating to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in Africa.

2. This briefing note is prepared in the context of the PSC's regular engagement with the Panel of the Wise on its activities in Africa. It builds on previous PSC sessions on the activities of the Panel and its subsidiary mechanisms, as well as the Council's broader reflections on re-energizing conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. It is intended not only to provide an update on recent engagements, but also to support collective reflection on where the Panel adds greatest value, how its future engagements may be more strategically prioritized and used, and how preventive diplomacy may be more effectively deployed in support of sustainable peace.

3. It may be recalled that the current members of the Panel of the Wise, H.E. Domitien Ndayizeye, former President of Burundi and Chairperson of the Panel of the Wise, H.E. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Deputy President of South Africa, Hon. Justice (Rtd) Effie Owuor, former Judge of the Court of Appeal of Kenya, and Professor Babacar Kanté, former Vice-President of the Constitutional Court of Senegal, were appointed in 2025 for a second and final three-year term.

4. The present session therefore provides an opportunity not only to review what has been undertaken, but also to reflect on what recent interventions reveal about where the Panel adds greatest value, how its future engagements may be more strategically prioritized and used, and how the Panel may be more effectively deployed in support of the Commission's and the Council's broader conflict prevention efforts.

II. CONTEXT

5. The peace and security environment on the continent remains marked by protracted political transitions, electoral tensions, governance-related contestation, borderland insecurities, community grievances, and increasingly regionalized conflict dynamics. In such an environment, the utility of the Panel of the Wise lies in its ability to engage discreetly, early and politically, particularly where formal channels are constrained, trust among actors has eroded, or parallel initiatives require greater coherence.

6. From 2022 to 2025, the Panel undertook approximately 47 missions and formal engagements across 19 Member States in all five AU regions. More than 60 per cent of these engagements were preventive in character, with electoral contexts accounting for a substantial share of country deployments, while South Sudan emerged as the most sustained file of repeated accompaniment.

7. Taken together, the Panel's engagements during this period suggest a gradual shift from largely episodic electoral and fact-finding missions toward more politically sensitive accompaniment in contexts marked by transition, governance-related contestation, mediation fragmentation and declining trust among stakeholders. The cumulative record indicates that the Panel is most effective where it is able to engage early, discreetly and over time, and where its interventions are linked to broader AU, regional and national efforts rather than undertaken as isolated missions.

8. This assessment is broadly consistent with previous PSC reflections on the role of the Panel and the need to strengthen preventive diplomacy, including through more regular engagement between the Council and the Panel and greater strategic use of the Panel and its subsidiary mechanisms in support of conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding.

III. LESSONS EMERGING FROM RECENT INTERVENTIONS

9. A first lesson is that the Panel adds greatest value when it engages early, before political positions harden and before crises fully escalate. This has been particularly evident in electoral and transition contexts, where timely engagement can support de-escalation, dialogue and reliance on constitutional dispute-resolution mechanisms.

10. A second lesson is that sustained political accompaniment often yields greater strategic value than isolated engagement. South Sudan remains the clearest example. The High-Level Reflection Roundtable in Addis Ababa in July 2024, engagement with Tumaini Initiative stakeholders in Nairobi, shuttle diplomacy across key regional capitals, and the follow-up mission to Juba in November 2024 collectively demonstrated that transitions marked by trust deficits, delayed reforms and parallel political processes require repeated and sequenced accompaniment rather than episodic visits. These engagements also underscored the importance of preserving coherence between the Tumaini process and the R-ARCSS, strengthening regional alignment, and linking high-level political engagement to electoral, constitutional and security sector concerns.

11. A third lesson is that the authority of the Panel should be used selectively. In an increasingly crowded mediation and preventive diplomacy space, the issue is not only how often the Panel is deployed, but whether it is deployed in contexts where its discretion, moral authority and political judgment can meaningfully influence outcomes, preserve channels of communication, or reinforce coherence across multiple tracks.

12. A fourth lesson is that many crises are increasingly rooted in governance-related tensions, including constitutional contestation, political exclusion, weak accountability and declining public trust. Preventive diplomacy is therefore likely to be more effective when it addresses these risks earlier and more deliberately, rather than intervening only once instability has become acute. In contexts of military-led transition, this also requires strengthening channels between transitional authorities and civilian actors, including political parties, civil society organizations and community leaders, so that transitions are managed not only as security processes, but also as inclusive political processes.

13. Taken together, these lessons suggest that the comparative advantage of the Panel lies less in the volume of its engagements than in the political quality of its deployments: its ability to enter early, preserve channels of communication, support mediation coherence, and engage actors who may be unwilling or unable to interact through more formal processes.

IV. SELECTED RECENT ENGAGEMENTS OF THE CURRENT PANEL

14. During 2025, the current Panel continued to operationalize preventive diplomacy in both electoral and non-electoral contexts.

15. In South Sudan, members of the Panel undertook a high-level engagement from 31 March to 2 April 2025 aimed at encouraging calm, supporting continued dialogue among key national stakeholders, and reinforcing confidence in nationally agreed political mechanisms. This engagement

built on the rapport already established with political actors across the spectrum and confirmed the continued relevance of sustained accompaniment in the South Sudanese transition.

16. The South Sudan file also increasingly demonstrated the importance of linking high-level political accompaniment to grassroots peace support. The consultative engagement with South Sudanese civil society actors in June 2025 from the different regions of the country enabled local actors to articulate priorities relating to the peace process, community security, political inclusion and implementation gaps at sub-national level, and helped identify follow-up priorities for stronger support to grassroots peace efforts, community dialogue, early warning and localized peacebuilding. This direction is consistent with earlier calls for AU engagement in South Sudan to extend beyond elite political processes alone.

17. In electoral contexts, the Panel pursued a sequenced approach combining early engagement, confidence-building and, where appropriate, post-electoral accompaniment. This was reflected in Malawi, Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, including in coordination with African Union Election Observation Missions, regional actors and national institutions. The pattern suggests that the Panel is most useful in electoral files when deployed not merely as an adjunct to observation, but as part of a broader preventive diplomacy approach combining political access, confidence-building and institutional support.

18. In Madagascar, H.E. Domitien Ndayizeye and Professor Babacar Kanté, together with H.E. Idriss Farah, Special Envoy for Madagascar, engaged national stakeholders and regional actors in support of dialogue and institutional continuity, in line with a broader whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

19. In December 2025, the Panel further broadened the societal grounding of its preventive diplomacy through a consultative roundtable with religious and traditional leaders from West Africa and the Sahel in Dakar. The meeting underscored the role of faith-based and traditional authorities as trusted actors in promoting social cohesion, supporting community-level mediation and strengthening early warning. It also highlighted an important challenge, namely that many ordinary citizens, as well as influential societal actors, remain insufficiently informed about the role of the African Union, the mandate of the Panel of the Wise, and the ways in which AU preventive diplomacy operates in practice. The discussions emphasized the need for stronger outreach, greater civic awareness efforts, including through women and youth networks, and more structured engagement with these actors so that they can serve as entry points and conduits for trust-building and confidence-building.

V. SUBSIDIARY MECHANISMS

20. The continued relevance of the Panel is also linked to the strengthening of its subsidiary mechanisms. FemWise-Africa and WiseYouth have reinforced the inclusivity of women and youth in mediation, preventive diplomacy and electoral processes. Previous PSC discussions on the activities of the Panel and its subsidiary mechanisms have underscored the importance of these platforms and encouraged their greater operational use in AU-led efforts.

21. The cumulative experience suggests that the Panel's effectiveness is enhanced when it operates not as a standalone mechanism, but through a broader ecosystem that includes PanWise, FemWise-Africa, WiseYouth, community actors and comparable mechanisms within the RECs/RMs.

VI. CHALLENGES AFFECTING EFFECTIVENESS

22. A first challenge is that preventive diplomacy can remain too closely tied to acute political moments, particularly elections and immediate crises, rather than engaging sufficiently early on the governance deficits that often generate instability.

23. A second challenge concerns governance-related tensions arising from unconstitutional changes of government, contested constitutional and legal reforms, and fragile political transitions. Recent experience suggests that transitions cannot be treated as purely formal exercises but need to be accompanied as opportunities for restoring constitutional order, strengthening democratic governance, rebuilding state resilience and reinforcing the rule of law. In this regard, differences in institutional culture, decision-making practice and approaches to political negotiation between military-led authorities and civilian actors can complicate dialogue, generate mistrust and slow the development of inclusive transition arrangements. Such contexts require preventive diplomacy that is both principled and pragmatic, capable of upholding AU norms while also facilitating communication, confidence-building and more constructive engagement among stakeholders.

24. A third challenge is that many situations requiring preventive diplomacy are no longer purely national in character. Instability is increasingly shaped by regional political dynamics, borderland tensions, community grievances, armed actors, competition over mineral resources, and external interests. Greater attention is therefore required to borders, indigenous methods of resolving cross-border disputes, and the scramble for mineral resources as a driver of instability.

25. A fourth challenge concerns limited public awareness of the AU and its preventive diplomacy mechanisms. The Dakar consultations suggested that even influential societal actors often lack sufficient understanding of what the AU does, how it works, and how local actors may interface with its mechanisms. This weakens trust, early-warning linkages and local anchoring.

26. A fifth challenge lies less in the formal existence of preventive diplomacy tools than in whether they are used early enough, consistently enough and politically enough. Recent experience suggests that the Panel's comparative advantage is greatest in contexts requiring discreet political access, confidence-building and sustained accompaniment. However, this potential is not always fully leveraged across the Commission's engagement with sensitive files. The issue, therefore, is not only capacity, but the extent to which the Panel is systematically deployed as a political instrument in support of the Commission's broader prevention, mediation and transition-related efforts.

27. A sixth challenge is that timely preventive diplomacy depends on sustained analytical support, flexibility for rapid deployment, and more regular strategic engagement with the PSC and relevant AU structures. Members of the Panel have consistently emphasized the importance of deeper substantive engagement, stronger analytical backstopping, more agile follow-up, and more regular interaction with the PSC and AU leadership, including through interim virtual engagements where necessary.

28. A seventh challenge concerns the composition of the Panel itself. The absence of a consensus-based appointment for the Northern Region continues to affect the full regional representativeness, political reach and operational completeness of the current Panel.

VII. PRIORITY AREAS FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

29. Recent experience suggests that a sharper concentration of effort would enhance the Panel's relevance.

30. Future prioritization may therefore be guided by four considerations: whether early intervention could still alter the trajectory of a situation; whether governance-related tensions risk hardening into crisis; whether regional dynamics or parallel mediation efforts require greater coherence; and whether the Panel's political authority is likely to open access or preserve channels that other instruments cannot.

31. First, South Sudan should remain a priority file for sustained accompaniment, including continued dialogue with political actors across the spectrum and stronger links with conflict-affected states, communities and grassroots actors. Earlier PSC reflections have already stressed the need for more frequent engagement, stronger AU presence on the ground, and continued support for constitutional, electoral and security sector processes.

32. Second, greater attention should be given to border-related issues, particularly the vulnerabilities and grievances of communities in border areas, as well as the confidence-building role of community elders, religious leaders, civil society actors and cross-border initiatives.

33. Third, the Panel of the Wise may need to be used more proactively in contexts marked by constitutional or legal reforms that risk weakening democratic alternation, diluting or removing term limits, concentrating executive authority, or otherwise narrowing political and civic space and undermining public confidence in inclusive governance.

34. Fourth, the Panel is well placed to support inclusive dialogue in transitions following unconstitutional changes of government, including by helping bridge gaps between military-led authorities and civilian actors, political parties and civil society organizations. Such engagement would be consistent with the broader continental recognition that transitions should be adapted to context, remain inclusive and participatory, and be supported through dialogue, mediation and contextualized responses rather than rigid templates alone.

35. Fifth, regular PSC engagements with the Panel should increasingly serve as spaces for strategic reflection on the state of the continent, and not only as reporting sessions on missions undertaken. This would help strengthen early warning, strategic foresight and timely preventive action, while also enabling more deliberate political guidance on where and how the Panel should be used.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

36. In light of the foregoing, and taking into account the Panel's comparative advantage in early, discreet, politically selective and sustained preventive engagement, the Council may wish to:

- a) Take note of the lessons emerging from recent interventions of the Panel of the Wise, selected recent engagements, and the challenges affecting its continued relevance and effectiveness;
- b) Reaffirm the central role of the Panel of the Wise as the African Union's primary mechanism for preventive diplomacy under Article 11 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council;
- c) Affirm that regular PSC engagements with the Panel should serve not only as briefings on activities undertaken, but also as opportunities for collective strategic reflection on continental trends in peace, conflict and governance;

- d) Request timely preventive diplomacy and good offices, through the Panel of the Wise and in coordination with relevant RECs/RMs, in situations marked by constitutional or legal reforms that may weaken democratic alternation, dilute or remove term limits, concentrate executive authority, or otherwise undermine political inclusion, confidence in state institutions and the principles of democratic change of government;
- e) Encourage timely preventive diplomacy and good offices by the Panel of the Wise in countries undergoing political transition following unconstitutional changes of government, with a view to promoting constructive engagement between transitional authorities and civilian stakeholders, including political parties and civil society organizations;
- f) Encourage that support to countries in transition be informed by contextualized diagnosis, inclusive political dialogue, coordination with relevant RECs/RMs, and sustained mediation efforts aimed at strengthening democratic governance, state resilience and the rule of law;
- g) Encourage sustained engagement in South Sudan, including support for dialogue, confidence-building, coherence across transition-related processes, and stronger links with grassroots peace efforts and affected communities;
- h) Encourage follow-up on the priorities identified with South Sudanese civil society actors from the different regions of the country, with a view to strengthening support for grassroots peace efforts, community-level dialogue, early warning and localized peacebuilding;
- i) Encourage stronger preventive engagement on border-related issues, including through community-based dialogue, cross-border confidence-building and closer attention to the grievances of communities in border areas, building on the outcomes of the Brazzaville retreat;
- j) Encourage follow-up on the outcomes of the Dakar consultation with religious and traditional leaders from West Africa and the Sahel, including through stronger outreach and structured engagement with community-level actors in order to improve understanding of the role of the AU and its preventive diplomacy mechanisms;
- k) Underscore the importance of a fully constituted and regionally representative Panel of the Wise in order to ensure its full credibility, reach and effectiveness, and encourage the finalization of the remaining regional appointment; and
- l) Support more regular and structured engagement between the PSC and the Panel of the Wise, including interim virtual exchanges where necessary, in order to strengthen early warning, strategic reflection and timely preventive action.