

# ANNUAL REVIEW

## THE PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2020: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

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# THE PEACE AND SECURITY IN 2020: THE YAER IN REVIEW

## 2020 REVIEW OF THE PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

As the year of the novel coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic, 2020 presented a unique challenge to the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC), as it did to many institutions. In the work of the PSC, the year will be remembered more by the fact that the PSC sustained the continuity of its work in the face of the disruption COVID19 brought about across the world than by the deployment of any major new peace and security initiative. In this report, we provide a review of the work of the PSC during 2020, including how the PSC overcame the threat that COVID19 posed to the continuity of its work.

## MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

The impact of COVID19, while not the most dominant issue on the agenda of the PSC, received significant attention in the work of the PSC during the year. As shown in the table below (Table 1), the PSC held a number of sessions dedicated to the theme of the impact of the pandemic on peace and security in Africa. Additionally, the impact of the pandemic also featured on the agenda of the PSC related to specific conflict situations or thematic issues.

One of the major impacts of the pandemic has been on the working methods of the PSC itself. With the pandemic preventing the regular convening of its sessions physically, the PSC introduced a new

working method ([Amani Africa, Special Report No.6](#)) to sustain the continuity of its work through virtual sessions. The PSC has been holding its sessions through video teleconference (VTC) since its first VTC session was held on 9 April 2020.

Despite this continuity of the work of the PSC by shifting to a virtual platform, the pandemic limited the work of the PSC to the minimum. The PSC was unable to carry out some of its regular activities such as induction of new members of the PSC and undertaking field missions. Moreover, the PSC did not have programme of work prepared for the months of August and December and no official chairs were assigned on both months – activities of the Council having been undertaken by stand-by chairs. In August, Council convened only two sessions, one of which was an emergency session on Mali, convened as a response to the 18 August coup. In December, there was only one session on a substantive matter. This trend has been outside of the ordinary, not to mention contradictory to Article 2 of the PSC Rules of Procedure, which stipulates that the Council should convene sessions at least twice a month.

Another notable development related to PSC's work in 2020 involved the military coup in Mali. Particularly, following the ouster of former President Boubacar Keita through a military coup that took place in August, the PSC has played, along with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a key role in upholding the AU norm on unconstitutional changes of government and pushing for the handover of power by the military junta to a civilian-led transitional government as a step towards the restoration of constitutional order in Mali. The PSC held 3 sessions on the unconstitutional changes

of government in Mali. Another major development that took place in 2020 is the engagement of the PSC with respect to the end of AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and its replacement with the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). It is to be recalled that UNSC Resolution 2525(2000) extended UNAMID’s mandate until the end of December and expressed the intention to decide on 31 December 2020, the course of action with regards to UNAMID’s exit. The PSC welcomed this decision in the Communiqué of its 931st meeting adopted on 17 June 2020.

### ACTIVITIES OF THE PSC IN 2020

PSC Sessions with Outcome Documents (57 Sessions)					
Country Specific Sessions (30 Sessions)					
Northern Africa	East and Horn of Africa	Central Africa	West Africa and the Sahel	Southern Africa	
1 session	16 sessions	2 sessions	10 sessions	1 session	
Thematic Sessions (27)					
APSA	Consultative Meetings	Specific Category of People	Election & Gov.	General Themes	COVID19
2 Sessions	3 Sessions	5 Sessions	2 Sessions	10 Sessions	5 Sessions

Table 1: 2020 Sessions of the AUPSC

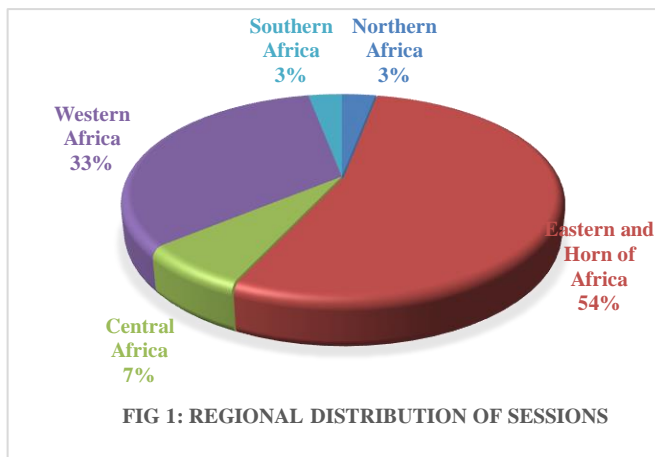
The PSC had a total of 70 sessions in 2020, highlighting that the impact of the pandemic on the overall number of sessions of the PSC was minimal. As captured in Table 1 above, out of the total sessions with outcome documents (which were 57), 53% were on conflict specific agenda items and the remaining 47% were on thematic agenda items. While Council’s decision on the Great Lakes Region is the only conflict specific session without an outcome

document, there are also no publicly available outcome documents for one of its sessions on Silencing the Guns (STG) and one consultative meeting with the UN Peace Building Commission (UNPBC).

The conflict specific sessions that featured in 2020 were basically continuation of meetings convened in 2019 – no new conflict situations were added to the Council’s agenda. Some country specific situations which have been part of the PSC agenda prior to 2019 – mainly Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – were not part of the Council’s agenda in 2020 as well. On the other hand, the situation in Abyei area, which has not been considered by the PSC as an independent agenda since 2015, was considered by the Council in November 2020 at its 966th session.

Interestingly, the PSC was able to conduct sessions on most of its standing thematic agenda items despite the limitations resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. Nonetheless, some of its thematic sessions such as ‘elections in Africa’ were not convened with the same frequency as previous years. Also, some of its frequent thematic sessions such as ‘use and proliferation of small arms and light weapons’; ‘unconstitutional change of governments in Africa’; and ‘genocide and hate crimes’ were not addressed in 2020.

## REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF PSC'S ACTIVITIES IN 2020



As Fig1 above demonstrates, 54% of the Council's country/region specific sessions were committed to conflict situations in the horn region, whereas West Africa took up 33% of these sessions. These trends in regional distribution of sessions are more or less similar to that noted in 2019, where majority of the conflict specific sessions addressed countries in the Horn of Africa region, in West Africa, mostly Mali and Sahel and in the Central African region as well as North Africa.

### PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

Three country specific conflict situations, namely Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, continued to dominate the agenda of the PSC for this region during 2020 as they did in the preceding years. Unlike previous years the regularity of these conflict situations on agenda of the PSC is partly a manifestation of the incremental progress registered in these countries. After repeated delays, South Sudanese parties managed to form the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in February. The political dialogue between

the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Federal Member States (FMS), particularly the agreement reached on the Electoral Model of 2020/21 national elections, represented an important step towards the holding of elections in Somalia, despite subsequent political disputes creating uncertainties. Sudan has also been able to achieve major milestones in its political transition with the signing of the 3 September 2020 Joint Agreement on Principles and the 3 October 2020 Peace Agreement and the success in its negotiation for its removal from US's list of States Sponsor of Terrorism.

Despite the progress these countries registered, the situation in each remains fragile. In South Sudan, apart from violence and insecurity resulting from slow pace of the implementation of the security arrangements and fighting involving some rebel groups and inter-communal clashes, some of the key provisions of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) are yet to be implemented. Somalia's security situation remains fragile, particularly due to rising Al-Shabaab attacks and tensions between the FGS and some FMS which could escalate further as the time for elections nears. Sudan's economic crisis also endangers the prevailing relative peace in the country. Some Sudanese hold-out armed groups have also not yet joined the peace agreements and sporadic fighting in some parts of the State continue to challenge the peace efforts.

### SOUTH SUDAN

In 2020, the PSC convened a total of 4 sessions on the situation in South Sudan. These were the 905th, 912th, 917th and 945th sessions. Considering its

concern about the existence of armed groups that are not part of the peace process, such as Thomas Cirilo and Paul Malong, the PSC at its 905th meeting convened in January 2020, welcomed the signing of the Rome Declaration for Ceasefire with pledges made by both Cirilo and Malong as well as Mr. Pagan Amum, to cease hostilities.

At its 912th meeting, where the PSC considered the report of its field visit to South Sudan, the formation of the R- TGoNU was welcomed. In addition to this major milestone in the implementation of the R-ARCSS, other positive developments include reduction in armed fighting and the improvement in the security situation resulting in the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their places of origin. The establishment of a National Taskforce specifically aimed at addressing the growing intercommunal violence is also among the progresses noted by the PSC at its 945th session.

The PSC also focused in its various sessions on the implementation of key elements of the R-ARCSS. These include notably the security arrangements, underscoring the importance of employing efforts towards the formation and deployment of the National Unified Forces (NUF) and the transitional justice mechanisms specified in Chapter V of the R-ARCSS. In addition, the continued stalemate between the parties with regards to the appointment of governor for upper Nile State as well as the differences relating to the three administrative areas, namely: Abyei; Ruweng; and the Greater Pibor have been identified as areas of concerns. It is also clear from the R-ARCSS that the transitional period which commenced on 22 February 2020 is expected to last for 36 months and general elections are expected to be held 60 days

prior to the expiry of this period. Taking account of that, the PSC has stressed at its 912th meeting, the importance of creating conducive conditions for the convening of credible and peaceful election.

Other major concerns Council highlighted throughout its sessions are: persistent violations of agreements on cessation of hostilities; targeted attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers; and restriction of access to humanitarian agencies compounded by the impact of COVID-19, highlighting that there is still much to be desired in seeing the peace process come to full success.

## SUDAN

In 2020, there were 6 sessions convened by the PSC on Sudan. These were the 906th, 913th, 927th, 931st, 952nd and 968th meetings. One of the major areas of preoccupation of the PSC was the threat that the country's economic challenges pose to the transition and the stability of the power sharing transitional government. In this respect, among others, the PSC dedicated its 906th session for engaging Sudan and the US Special Envoy for Sudan, Donald Booth, in pursuit of its push for the removal of economic sanctions on Sudan, including Sudan's removal from the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism. This issue received further attention in subsequent sessions of the PSC as well.

The peace process relating to Darfur and the two areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile was the other area of the transition that received particular attention by the PSC. In this respect, at its 952nd meeting, the PSC welcomed the Peace Agreement signed between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the



Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) and the Sudan Liberation Movement of Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) and the 3 September 2020 joint agreement on principles signed by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Abdelaziz al-Hilu, the Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N-AH). As in South Sudan, the peace process faces the challenge of the existence of rebel groups who are yet to join the peace process.

With regards to outstanding tasks to be carried out throughout the transitional period, the PSC, as reflected in the communique of its 952nd session, has mainly focused on the pending formation of the Transitional Legislative Assembly (expected to be finalized by 3 December 2020) and the appointment of civilian State governors. At its 931st session, the PSC urged the Sudanese Independent Fact-Finding Committee to finalise the investigations into the gruesome killings that took place on 3 June 2019, although the PSC did not follow up this matter in subsequent sessions.

The other aspect of PSC's engagement on the situation in Sudan relates to the drawdown of the African Union United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the form that the follow up to UNAMID takes. At its 913th meeting, the PSC specifically called for extreme caution on the implementation of UNAMID's drawdown. The PSC has at its 968th meeting endorsed the recommendations by the AUC Chair and UNSG to terminate the mandate of UNAMID by 31 December 2020. Despite earlier indication for maintaining the joint character of the mechanism to be established upon the termination of UNAMID, the PSC accepted a post- UNAMID presence run by the UN without

AU's involvement, namely the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS).

## SOMALIA AND AMISOM

The PSC has convened 3 sessions – the 911th, 923rd and 949th meetings – on the situation in Somalia and AMISOM during 2020. In the previous year, the PSC dedicated nearly twice more sessions.

With respect to the political process in Somalia, a major area of concern for the PSC has been the relationship between the FGS and the FMS. Indicating the critical importance of this for the stability of Somalia, the PSC at its 949th meeting welcomed the dialogue between FGS and FMS, particularly the Dhuusamareeb consultation process and its resulting agreement on the electoral model for national elections of 2020/21. In terms of the peace process including the incremental handover of security responsibilities from AMISOM to Somalia security forces, the PSC also pushed for the review of the Somalia Transitional Plan (STP). As highlighted by the PSC at its 949th meeting, following the completion of the STP review, the AUC is expected to work in collaboration with AMISOM to review AMISOM 2018-2021 CONOPs and ensure that they are aligned with the revised STP.

In terms of the drawdown of AMISOM forces, additional 1000 troops have been withdrawn during the year in accordance with Resolution 2472 and the communique of the PSC's 911th session, although the PSC at its 923rd meeting expressed 'the imperative need' to halt further drawdown of AMISOM uniformed personnel.

PSC takes the position for sustaining current troop levels of AMISOM for supporting the landmark elections expected to be held in Somalia and containing the threat Al Shabaab continues to pose. While its presidential elections are scheduled for February 2021, Somalia was expected to conduct its parliamentary elections in December 2020. At the time of finalizing this review report, the parliamentary election has not yet been held. As various reports continue to suggest increasing likelihood of delays in the convening of the elections in Somalia due to the political stand-off between FGS and oppositions, there are fears of adverse consequences on the fragile stability of the country.

## **PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICA REGION**

Much like the previous year, the PSC's focus on the Central African Region has been minimal in 2020. Other than the session on the Great Lakes Region, there were only two sessions convened on the situation in Central African Republic (CAR) – the 936th and 972nd sessions. Despite reduced number of sessions for situations in this region, the peace and security condition in the region including the situations in CAR,<sup>1</sup> Cameroon<sup>2</sup> (which is not on the agenda of the PSC) and the DRC<sup>3</sup> did not register much improvement.

<sup>1</sup> Following disagreement over the timing and conditions of the convening of the national elections scheduled for end of December, new fighting has broken further undermining the fragile security situation in the country, with the attempt of rebel groups to seize the capital city blocked by UN and forces from Rwanda and Russia.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of the Cameroon continue to experience violence due to fighting with secessionist rebel groups, indiscriminate attacks and terrorist operations of Boko Haram.

<sup>3</sup> While Eastern DRC continues to experience violence due to the operation of various rebel groups including the militant ADF, the political situation experienced destabilizing tension leading to the collapse of the ruling coalition formed by the parties of President Tshisekedi and his predecessor Joseph Kabila.

Burundi has not featured on PSC's agenda since 2018. At its 4 December 2020 meeting, the UNSC has struck off Burundi from its agenda. While Burundi meets the stipulation in Art.7(3) of the Rules of Procedure of the PSC for removal from PSC agenda as well, it is listed in the annual indicative program of work of the PSC for 2021.

## **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)**

The first session of the PSC to address the situation in the CAR was the 936th session. With respect to the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR, the PSC, while welcoming the adoption of the relevant laws and establishment of the Reconciliation Commission and the progress in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, including the deployment of the Joint Special Security Units, underscored the need for adhering to the cessation of hostilities.

From the perspective of the adoption of new conflict management and resolution tools by the PSC, the most important outcome of the 936th session is the decision of the PSC authorizing the deployment of the African Union Military Observers Mission to the Central African Republic (MOUACA). The PSC endorsed the deployment of MOUACA for the period from 1 September 2020 to 31 October 2022. The request of the PSC for receiving update on a quarterly basis has not been followed up during the year.

While the status of operationalization of MOUACA remains unclear due in part to the COVID19 pandemic, AU's mission signed an MoU with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated

Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on 8 May 2020 specifying areas for support and collaboration between the two missions, as envisaged in the communique of the 936th session.

On the preparations for the convening of national elections, the PSC at its 936th session urged the CAR stakeholders and State institutions to expedite the adoption of the revised organic law of the National Election Authority and to build consensus around its composition, organization and functioning. Its 972nd session, which focused on the electoral process and the destabilizing disagreement on the elections, expressed PSC's rejection of any attempts at unconstitutional political transition in the country and called for respect of the electoral calendar. Expressing deep concern over the escalation of violence in the country, it condemned all leaders of armed groups and political actors seeking to derail the electoral process, specifically singling out former President of the country François Bozize for being personally responsible for the human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity resulting from the armed rebellion war waged against the Government and MINUSCA initiated by his collusion with some armed groups.

## WESTERN AFRICA

The situation in Sahel and Mali dominated the Council's 2020 deliberations on peace and security situation in West Africa and the Sahel. Compared to 2019 when Council held only two sessions on Mali and Sahel, it has held 4 times as many sessions (eight sessions) on the situation in the region during 2020, partly attributable to the coup in Mali.

Guinea Bissau and Gambia were also in the PSC's agenda during 2020. The PSC held only 1 session at its 905th meeting welcoming the outcome of the elections in Guinea Bissau. However, the country has been experiencing post- election crisis throughout 2020 amidst growing military interference which seems to be threatening the country's stability. While the National Electoral Commission declared Umaro Sissoco Embaló (who is claimed to have support of the military) winner of 2019 presidential election, former PM Domingos Simões Pereira rejected the result. The situation deteriorated further with Embalo dismissing former PM Aristides Gomes from the parliamentary majority and replaced him with Nuno Gomes Nabiam.

In Gambia, there have been some protests in early 2020, calling for President Adama Barrow to step down from his position, as per his promise to remain in office no longer than 3 years. Gambia's Independent Electoral Commission declared in mid-2020 that presidential elections are scheduled to take place on 4 December 2021. The democratization process in the country also suffered a major blow due to the failure of the parliament to adopt a new constitution drafted with wide public participation and support.

The security situation in Mali and the Sahel has continued to deteriorate. The rate of terrorist attacks in the Sahel region and related displacement has shown alarming increase in 2020. For instance, a 92% increase was recorded in the displacement of people fleeing Burkina Faso, as compared to 2019. Within Mali alone, there are reportedly 240,000 internally displaced persons, out of which 54% are women. A trend of terrorist attacks targeting refugees and



asylum seekers has also been noted in 2020. In Niger, about 489,000 asylum seekers and refugees have been forced into secondary displacement following terrorist attacks.

## MALI AND THE SAHEL

The PSC had a total of 9 sessions dedicated to the situation in Mali and Sahel, including one session at the level of PSC Heads of State and Government.

Regarding Mali, main focus has been concentrated on the political situation in the country and the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Mali (the 2015 Algiers Agreement). In light of the popular protests and the political crisis that followed the contested parliamentary elections, at its 938th session, the PSC emphasised the fragility of the nation's peace and constitutional order.

Following the coup on 18 August 2020, the PSC at its 941st session convened on 19 August, the PSC imposed the immediate suspension of Mali from participating in AU activities. It also emphasized the urgent need for resolution of the crisis based on respect for constitutional order and reflecting the aspirations of the people of Mali and for creating conditions for return of civilian rule (emphasis added). At its 946th session, the PSC clarified its call for return of civilian rule when it stated what it called 'its reiteration of its call for the immediate formation of a civilian-led transitional government' while categorically rejecting any attempt by the military to lead or influence the transition. Following the adoption of a transitional charter and the formation of a 'civilian-led' transitional government based on the decision of ECOWAS, which the PSC endorsed at its

946th session, the PSC at its 954th session decided, following ECOWAS, to lift the suspension of Mali, while emphasizing respect for the transitional charter and the 18 months transitional period.

On the Sahel region in general, the continued spread of terrorism has been the PSC's major area of concern. The bordering area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger is still experiencing high rate of terrorist attacks and insurgency. Against this background and based on the PSC summit meeting held on 8 February 2020 on the situation in Mali and the Sahel, the AU Assembly decided [Assembly/AU/Dec.792 (XXXIII)] on the possible deployment, within the relevant provisions of the PSC Protocol related to the African Standby Force (ASF), of a force composed of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and 3000 troops for six months in order to further degrade terrorist groups in the Sahel. As a follow up to this, at its 920th meeting, Council welcomed the 'Draft Strategic Concept Note on Planning Guidance for the Deployment of 3000 troops to Sahel' developed by the AUC. At its 950th meeting, the draft Revised Concept Note was endorsed by the PSC with a request for the AUC to operationalise Technical Committee provided for in the draft. In addition, PSC has repeatedly called on the AUC, ECOWAS and the Member States of the G5 Sahel to develop Concept of Operations (CONOPs) for the deployment of the 3000 troops.

It is also interesting to note Council's request at its 920th session for the AUC to fully utilise African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) frameworks and tools to find lasting solutions to the crisis in the Sahel region.

The mandate of the G5 Sahel Joint Taskforce was also renewed at Council's 939th session, for a one-year period starting from 13 July 2020. At the same session, Council welcomed the adoption of UNSC Res. 2531 (2020) extending the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Intergraded Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

## **GAMBIA**

In 2020, the PSC had one session on Gambia – the 942nd session – which took place during August. Council mainly discussed Gambia's national institutional reform process, highlighting the importance of reviewing and adopting essential legal instruments as well as allocating sufficient budget for the full realisation of reform goals. Taking account of the upcoming elections in Gambia in 2021, Council also called on the government to commence its preparations including through the implementation of AU instruments on elections, democracy and good governance. The same session extended the mandate of the AUTSTG for additional four months until 31 December 2020 and the AUC was requested to brief Council on the mission's activities and mobilisation of resources, for Council to consider further extension of its mandate post December 2020.

## **NORTHERN AFRICA**

The conflict situation of which the PSC is seized in the Northern Africa region – the situation in Libya – had only one ordinary session committed

to it during 2020, which was held on 3 November at the 961st session. The PSC meeting convened at the level of Heads of State and Government on 8 February 2020 also addressed Libya's

situation. Although Council's engagement on Libya has been limited during 2020, and despite improvements achieved around the end of the year, Libya has been faced with multiple challenges throughout 2020. For much of the year, Libya has experienced fighting and armed clashes, with the participation of external forces, which deepened the internationalization of the conflict.

## **LIBYA**

Following the PSC's summit level meeting held on 8 February, the AU Assembly adopted a decision, among other things, to upgrade the AU Liaison Office in Libya. Council's 961st meeting convened in November, served to consider some of the progresses obtained in Libya's peace and security situation and to underscore some of the main continuing challenges. Endorsing the 23 October 2020 Permanent Ceasefire Agreement, the PSC held, as one of the most notable outcomes of its session, that 'the AU should be fully engaged in all efforts aimed at overseeing the implementation of the ceasefire agreement on the ground, including by deploying civilian and military observers with the participation of AU, within the AU/UN framework for enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, in close

collaboration with the signatory parties of the Permanent Ceasefire Agreement’ and ‘AU’s participation in the Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CMVM) with African monitors on the ground’.

In terms of remaining challenges, Council highlighted the continued supply of arms in violation of UN imposed arms embargo; the continuation of foreign interference in the domestic affairs of Libya; and the operation of illegal detention centres housing African migrants with attendant violations meted out on the migrants.

### SOUTHERN AFRICA

It is possible to say that the PSC had no sessions on the Southern Africa region. However, the second APRM briefing of 2020 was a country review report of Mozambique. In addition, Council’s 929th meeting, on cessation of hostilities within the framework of AU’s theme of the year on STG and in context of COVID-19, had a particular focus on the security situation in Mozambique which has increasingly been threatened by terrorist attacks.

### MOZAMBIQUE

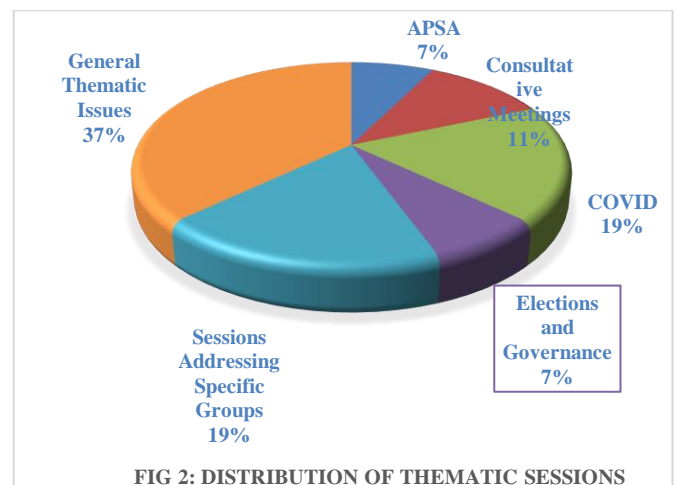
At its 929th meeting, which had a focus on cessation of hostilities within the context of COVID-19, the PSC addressed itself to the terrorist attacks in northern Mozambique, expressing its condemnation of the attacks and

noting the negative impacts on national efforts aimed at responding to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Welcoming the 19 May 2020 Troika Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the situation in Mozambique, the PSC expressed its readiness to support the efforts of SADC, signifying that it follows the leadership of the sub-regional body on this situation in Mozambique.

At PSC’s 962nd meeting, the APRM presented Mozambique’s peer review report. Apart from considering the socio-economic development, democracy, and political, economic and corporate governance issues

covered in the review report, the continued terrorist attacks particularly in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, was stressed by Council as area of concern.

### THEMATIC ISSUES



As captured in Table 1, the PSC had 27 thematic sessions with outcome documents, during 2020. Not surprisingly, there were fewer thematic sessions in 2020 as compared to 2019. Given the outbreak of the pandemic, the PSC only had one field visit – the field visit to South Sudan conducted on 18-20 February, prior to the declaration of COVID19 as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization.

## SESSIONS ON SPECIFIC GROUPS

As standing sessions in its yearly agenda, the PSC deliberates on peace and security issues relating to women; youth and children. In 2020, Council has convened two sessions relating to youth, peace and security; two sessions on protection and welfare of children; and one session on women, peace and security.

The Council's session on women, peace and security (WPS) was convened at its 951st session in October. The session focused on assessing the implementation of UNSC Res1325 (2000) on WPS in Africa, and was also a commemoration of 20th anniversary of Res1325(2000) & 25th anniversary of Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action. Increasing women's representation and involvement in AU peacekeeping and PSOs was of central focus in this year's PSC session on the WPS agenda. The Council has also taken note of some significant progresses registered in the implementation of UNSC Res1325 (2000) in Africa, mainly the increase in the adoption of NAPs for the implementation of WPS agenda.

Council's first meeting on protection of children was its 924th session convened with a particular focus on the impacts of COVID19 on the security and welfare

of children in Africa. Among other points, Council stressed the need for Member States to ensure that lockdown measures do not increase the vulnerabilities of children, particularly girls and welcomed the COVID19 guidelines the Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) issued. At its 965th session committed to addressing the protection of children affected by armed conflicts (CAAC) in Africa, the PSC welcomed the General Comment of the ACERWC on Article 22 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

One of the two sessions on youth, peace and security convened in 2020 – PSC's 963rd session – had a particular focus on identifying opportunities through which the roles

and capacities of African youth can be used in realising the STG goals. Its 933rd meeting was primarily focused on the adoption of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security and its 10-year Implementation Plan.

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

While 5 of its thematic sessions were devoted entirely to addressing issues related to the impacts of the pandemic on peace and security in Africa, concerns related to COVID19 were also discussed as part of other thematic and some country/region specific sessions of the PSC as well.

The first deliberation of the Council on the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic – 910th session – deemed the outbreak the pandemic capable of constituting 'a threat to peace and security in the Continent'. At its 918th session at which the PSC declared that 'the

COVID19 (pandemic) constitutes an existential threat to international peace and security', the Council's consideration of COVID19 on the continent highlighted the pandemic increasingly became an agenda around which Africa witnessed acceleration of multilateral coordination and action within the framework of the AU, through the leadership and coordination work of the AU Chairperson of 2020 and the Africa CDC. These intense AU level engagement of AU member states on COVID19 aimed at enhancing collective efforts to prevent and control the spread of the virus on the continent.

At its 926th session, in addition to reviewing developments relating to efforts for containing the virus, Council addressed various issues including the need to address potential risk of civil unrest due to lockdowns, protection of vulnerable groups and to conduct elections in a free, fair and credible manner while observing COVID19 prevention measures and ensure that decisions on holding or postponing elections are always made through consultative, inclusive and transparent manner.

In terms of utilising AU tools and mechanisms to control the spread and reduce the impacts of COVID-19, the PSC's remark at its 915th meeting that the pandemic triggers the applicability of the African Standby Force (ASF) capabilities, within the framework of its humanitarian functions, as outlined in the Protocol on the Establishment of the PSC, was most notable. It was within this framework that the Africa CDC deployed in May 2020 28 frontline responders from the DRC to Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and Niger.

In addition to its sessions specifically committed to

addressing the pandemic, some of the thematic sessions which were convened through a COVID-19 lens were those addressing welfare of children in Africa (924th session); the situation of IDPs, refugees and migrants (921st session); the realisation of the goals of AU's STG initiative (929th session); and the session on 'Living in Peace Together' (928th session).

## APSA

There were two sessions on APSA. This is excluding the various sessions convened on AU missions already addressed under respective country/regional situations they relate to.

The first APSA related session of 2020 was Council's 958th meeting on PCRCD. The meeting mainly served to welcome the inauguration of the Cairo based AUPCRD Centre and to emphasise the potential contribution it could make to achieve the objective of STG. Council decided at the sessions to reactivate its Sub-Committee on PCRCD. The Council also decided to be briefed twice a year by the AUC, on activities of the AUPCRD.

The second APSA related session was Council's 960th meeting which focused on the establishment of Special Counterterrorism Unit within the ASF. It is to be recalled that the mention of this Special Unit was first made at the PSC's 455th session which took place in 2014. The 960th meeting on the establishment of the Unit was convened as a follow up to the decision of the AU Assembly at its 33rd Ordinary Session held in February 2020. In pursuit of initiating efforts for the establishment of the special unit, the AUC was requested to provide technical



guidance and submit concrete proposals on technical aspects regarding establishment of the unit in 6 months period (with a deadline for 28 April 2021).

The table below also captures the mandate renewals and extensions of PSOs and peacekeeping missions adopted by the PSC during 2020<sup>4</sup>.

Mandate Renewals	
AMISOM	Mandate renewed for a period of 12 months from 27 May 2020 [at PSC's 923rd meeting] - expiring on 27 May 2021
G5-Sahel	Mandate renewed for a period of twelve (12) months, starting from 13 July 2020 [at PSC's 939th meeting] - expiring on 13 July 2021
UNAMID	Mandate extended up to 31 December 2020 [at PSC's 927th meeting]

Table 2: Mandate Renewals

## CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS

Council's annual consultative meeting with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) was convened at its 953rd session. Addressing human rights issues in the context of the COVID19 pandemic and the impact of such issues on peace and security, the PSC endorsed Resolution 449 of the ACHPR on 'Human and Peoples' Rights in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic' at its 953rd session. The session also addressed the full operationalization of the modalities for close working relationship outlined in the communique of the 866th session of the PSC, the role of the ACHPR in

supporting transitional justice processes and the critical need for compliance with human rights in all efforts for silencing the guns.

The 14th Joint Annual Consultative meeting of the AUPSC and UNSC took place on 30 September. It covered issues relating to the implementation of AU's master roadmap for

STG; realisation of AU 2063 Agenda goals; and commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of UNSC Res1325 – with a focus on renewed commitments to ensure full implementation of the resolution. In a closed session, the two Councils also addressed the situations in Somalia and Mali and the Sahel, although these were not covered in the joint-communiqué, which was agreed and issued with almost unprecedented speed.

The 12th Annual Consultative meeting of the AUPSC and EUPSC was the last consultative meeting of the year held on 26 October. The countries/regions that were on the agenda of the meeting were Sudan, Somalia, and Mali and Sahel. Regarding Mali and Sahel, the meeting mainly welcomed the formation of the 'Coalition for Sahel'. In addition, agreement was reached on the need for committing additional resources to support MINUSMA and G5 Sahel Joint Force. With respect to Somalia, the need to support the country's Security Sector Reform post- 2021 was emphasised. While not addressed as an agenda of the meeting, a few comments were also made with regards to transitions taking place in the Horn of Africa region in general.

<sup>4</sup> MNJTF's mandate was renewed in November 2019 at the 898th PSC session for a further period of twelfth months as of 31 January 2020

## ELECTION AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Council's sessions on election and governance related issues were its sessions on APRM and its session on 'elections in Africa'. Despite much election related issues arising in Africa during 2020, the PSC only had one session on this theme. The session, held at Council's 935th meeting, generally called on Member States to ensure that any COVID-19 related decisions on elections are reached through all-inclusive consultations of relevant actors.

While the elements of the second APRM interaction of the PSC – which was focused on Mozambique's APRM review – is already captured above, the first briefing of the APRM – PSC's 914th session – can generally be summed up as a session which acknowledged the contributions of the mechanism in addressing root-causes of conflicts and promoting conflict prevention. It was also at that session that the Council decided to convene twice a year to receive briefings on the works of the APRM with the early warning role of the APRM specifically highlighted.

## GENERAL THEMATIC ISSUES

As already stated above, some of PSC's recurring thematic sessions did not feature in its 2020 agenda. However, Council convened its standing sessions on humanitarian issues; on Living in Peace Together; the Africa Amnesty Month and on STG.

Given that STG has been AU's theme of 2020, many of PSC's sessions had elements dealing with the initiative, either directly or indirectly. Notably, Council's 943rd session on Amnesty Month had a focus on reviewing the progress and challenges in the

implementation of AU's STG goals. While 2020 was the last year for the commemoration of the amnesty month in line with Assembly/AU/Dec.645(XXIX), the PSC recommended at its 943rd session that the AU Assembly should extend amnesty month for a further period aligned with the First Ten Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP) of Agenda 2063. The PSC also convened two other sessions that were specifically devoted to the STG agenda: one held on 2 June and the other on 17 November. Out of these, only one had an outcome document – PSC's 929th meeting, calling for

COVID19 related cessation of hostilities within the framework of the AU Roadmap for STG.

There were also three sessions this year dealing with humanitarian issues. On natural disaster related concerns, the 917th session was convened addressing the desert locust invasion in Africa, which has been most prominent in the horn region. ICRC's yearly briefing on humanitarian issues also took place at Council's 904th meeting, while the 921st PSC session was committed to addressing the plight of IDPs, refugees and migrants in the context of COVID- 19 pandemic.

A new theme that was introduced in 2020 was the phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their impact on Peace and Security in Africa. While Council previously addressed the issue of FTFs within the framework of its sessions on 'terrorism and violent extremism', its 957th session of 2020 gave a specific attention to the impact of FTFs on Africa's peace and security.

In addition to these, Council also convened the 930th

session to commemorate African Border Day and had its 948th session on Common African Position on the 2020 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture.

## **PSC ELECTION AND MEMBERSHIP**

The tenure of ten members of the PSC serving for a two- year term ended in March 2020, and replaced by other members during the 36th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, held on 7 February. Current members of PSC, which assumed the two-year term seat as of April 1 are- Egypt, Chad, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Senegal, Benin, Ghana, Mozambique and Malawi. For details on the 2020 elections of the PSC, see the 10 February edition of our [Insight on the PSC](#).


## **WORKING METHODS OF THE PSC – CHANGES INTRODUCED IN 2020**

On 11 March, the PSC suspended all of its meetings until the end of April as part of COVID-19 safety measures. Notwithstanding, on the initiative of the PSC Chairperson of the month of April, the PSC adjusted its working methods to ensure the continuity of its work virtually. PSC members agreed to introduce the use of video conferencing (VTC) and electronic exchanges via email to continue discharging their mandates. More than 50 sessions have taken place in one of the two new working formats since then.

Overall, given the number of sessions and situations considered over the year, one may conclude that the adoption of the new working modalities has helped the Council to successfully navigate the extraordinary circumstances imposed by COVID19. Further

analysis on the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on the working methods of the PSC and the new working methods is available on Amani Africa's [Special Report](#).

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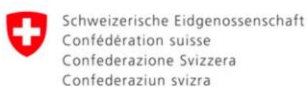


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