

The African Union's Role in the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Recentering the principle of non-indifference in implementation of Luanda summit outcome and the APSA review

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Venue: Hyatt Regency Addis Ababa

Convened by: Amani Africa

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Armed conflict across the African continent is widening in scale, geography and intensity at the very moment when the tools available to protect civilians are weakening. In the central Sahel, insurgencies led by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province have moved from rural peripheries to urban centres and deploying new tactics including imposing sieges on supply routes. The [United Nations](#) recorded some 2,640 conflict-related civilian deaths in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger between January and March 2026 alone. Alongside the Sahel, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan present two of the gravest civilian protection emergencies on the continent, and two of the clearest tests of whether the African Union's protection commitments translate into action on the ground.

In Sudan, the war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has produced the world's largest displacement crisis, with over 10 million people internally displaced and more than 4 million forced across borders. The fall of El Fasher to the RSF in October 2025 was followed by mass killings, sexual violence, and ethnically targeted atrocities that Amnesty International has documented as crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, with elements that may be relevant to the crime of genocide.

In eastern DRC, civilians across North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri continue to endure summary killings, widespread conflict-related sexual violence, attacks on hospitals, and repeated displacement at the hands of the M23, the Wazalendo, the FARDC, and the ADF, as documented in Amnesty International's briefing *They Said We Would Die* (2025) and its 2026 reporting on ADF abuses. Peace agreements and international diplomatic efforts have not halted the violence.

As documented in Amani Africa's [Re-energising Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa: a Quest to Salvage the APSA?](#) the African Peace and Security Architecture has struggled to respond to mounting challenges, with the lead on Libya, Sudan and the DRC–Rwanda file passing to actors outside the continent while the AU plays, at best, a secondary role. [An analysis](#) of January 2026, 'The Gathering Storm Facing Africa in 2026: Entrenching Conflicts, Fractured Order and Eroding Agency,' on the year ahead has framed the difficult context as a gathering storm of entrenching conflicts, a fractured order and eroding African agency.

That erosion is compounded by sustained pressure on the multilateral system itself. Of significance in this respect, as documented in [a policy brief on the 75th anniversary of the Geneva conventions](#), is the fact not only that there is widespread violation of multilateral norms including IHL and the Geneva conventions but also that 'these violations are occurring without any fear of accountability, thus with impunity, and are often cloaked in attempts to justify or legitimize them.' Amnesty International's 2026 annual report, *The State of the World's Human Rights*, warns of a predatory, anti-rights order taking hold, driven by assaults on multilateralism, international law and civil society. On the continent, the lack of follow up by the AU and particularly its Peace and Security Council on the report of the joint ACHPR-AU Commission Fact Finding Mission on Sudan further entrenches the environment of impunity that characterises the collapse of civilian

protection in Sudan as documented in a [special report](#). The question for the AU is therefore not only what it should do, but what it can still do along the lines of both this special report and what [Said Djinit and El-Ghassim Wane](#) outlined as the wider order fragments.

2. WHY NOW: THE APSA REVIEW AND THE LUANDA SUMMIT

This roundtable is deliberately timed. The AU has opened a review of its Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), informed by the APSA Review Report presented by President William Ruto as AU Champion on Institutional Reform, and Heads of State convened in Luanda on 30 August 2026 for an *Extraordinary Summit on Strengthening Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa*. The February 2026 Assembly decision framed Luanda as a strategic convening devoted exclusively to conflict prevention, intended to produce concrete, measurable and time-bound deliverables rather than another declarative forum. The central question the roundtable poses is a simple one: *what next after Luanda?* Will a revitalised architecture produce a more robust AU role in protecting civilians, or will the summit join a long line of declarations without follow-through?

The roundtable builds on the high-level expert policy dialogue Amani Africa convened in Nairobi on 13 and 14 July 2026 under the theme *The Quest for Restoring the AU's Agency in Peace and Security*, carrying that agenda into Addis Ababa with a specific focus on what a revitalised architecture means for civilians caught in conflict.

3. OBJECTIVES

- Connect the Luanda and APSA reform agenda to concrete, measurable protection outcomes for civilians in the Sudan, the DRC and the Sahel.
- Interrogate the feasibility of an AU-led or AU-authorized civilian protection presence in Sudan, and the pathways to operationalising *Resolution 2719*.
- Situate the AU's protection role within the wider strain on the multilateral order and the contest over African agency.

4. GUIDING QUESTIONS

- With a revitalised Peace and Security Architecture, will the AU take on a more robust role in the protection of civilians in Sudan, the DRC and the Sahel? If so, what does that look like?
- What are the realistic prospects for a civilian protection force in Sudan, given the drawdown of previous missions and the current impasse at the UN Security Council?
- Can *Resolution 2719* be moved from framework to funded reality for African crises, and what would it take to test it in Sudan, the DRC, or the Sahel?
- How can accountability, through the African Commission's Fact-Finding Mission, and universal jurisdiction, be treated as a pillar of protection rather than an afterthought, particularly in a context in which the multilateral framework for protection is weakening?
- How can affected communities, women-led and youth-led organisations, and human rights defenders be structurally included in AU protection decisions?

5. FORMAT AND PARTICIPANTS

The event will take the form of a moderated expert roundtable of roughly two and a half hours, hosted at the Hyatt Regency Addis Ababa. Short framing interventions will open each theme, followed by structured discussion.



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CONCEPT NOTE

Participants will be drawn from AU PSC ambassadors and PRC representatives; the AU Commission (Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Women, Peace and Security, and Humanitarian Affairs); the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; regional research institutions and policy experts; Sudanese, Congolese and Sahelian civil society, women-led and youth-led organisations, and human rights defenders; and the wider Addis-based diplomatic community.

6. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A shared reading of what the Luanda outcomes mean, in practice, for civilian protection in Sudan, the DRC and the Sahel
- A concise set of recommendations directed at the AU PSC and member states.
- Stronger, more sustained links between the AU, the expert community, and civil society organisations.
- A basis for structured follow-up on the Luanda outcomes through the PSC's subsequent programme of work.