



NVP-Amani-FES High Level Dialogue

Strengthening African-Led Conflict Prevention and Resolution: Seizing the Unique Opportunity that the Luanda Summit Presents

A Policy Dialogue in Advance of the Extraordinary AU Summit on Conflict Prevention

20 July 2026 | 2:00–5:00 PM (EAT) | Hyatt Regency Addis Ababa

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

At the February [2026 AU Heads of State Summit](#), a commitment was made to convene an extraordinary summit on strengthening conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, to be hosted by Angola. This summit will be convened at the end of August. As an initiative that follows the September 2025 summit-level meeting of the Peace and Security Council and complements the AU's ongoing effort to review the APSA, it represents an opportunity to have a frank conversation on both why prevention and resolution of conflicts are not working as they should and what urgent collective actions are required to strengthen conflict prevention and resolution.

The timing is not incidental. The African continent is experiencing a [convergence](#) of [protracted crises](#), [democratic backsliding](#), and a [new era](#) and [changing forms of conflict](#), including the proliferation of [non-state armed groups](#), [climate-related instability](#), and the systematic [targeting of civilians](#), that are straining existing response mechanisms. The AU's conflict prevention and resolution architecture, while normatively sophisticated, has struggled to activate in time to prevent escalation. The [gap between commitment and action](#) that has grown during the past years has created an image of the [African Union floating adrift as the new era of insecurity entrenches](#) on the continent.

This policy dialogue is convened to contribute substantive analysis and concrete options to the extraordinary summit process. It brings together senior representatives from the AU system, the UN, Member States, regional economic communities, civil society, think tanks, academia and community-level practitioners to examine why AU conflict prevention and resolution have underperformed, and what practical measures the Summit could adopt to revitalize prevention and resolution of conflicts in Africa, including the contribution that a more effective AU-UN partnership could make.

Background

The African Union (AU) is founded on the premise that conflict and development are inseparable. The Constitutive Act's preamble states that AU member states are "conscious of the fact that *the scourge of conflict constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of Africa*". Underscoring the particular importance it holds for realising the aims of the AU, the Act frames the promotion of peace, security and stability as "*a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda.*"

Going further, the founding member states of the AU expressed commitment in the preamble that, among others, the promotion of peace, security and stability is to be achieved "*through common institutions that are provided with the necessary powers and resources to enable them discharge their respective mandates effectively.*"

To this end, the [PSC Protocol](#), adopted in Durban in 2002 pursuant to Article 5(2) of the Constitutive Act, establishes the PSC and accompanying arrangements to "*enhance [their] capacity to address the scourge of conflicts on the Continent*" and to ensure that Africa "*plays a central role in bringing about peace, security and stability on the continent.*"

It was through this Protocol that the [African Peace and Security Architecture \(APSA\)](#) – arguably the most consequential institutional shift from the OAU to the AU – was established. The APSA consists of two components. The normative component commits member states to principles drawn from the Constitutive Act, the PSC Protocol and the Common African Defence and Security Policy, including:

- a) the ground-breaking principle of the right of the Union to intervene in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity in member states under Article 4(h)- the non-indifference principle;
- b) rejection of unconstitutional changes of government and suspension of countries in which governments come to power through unconstitutional changes of government (Article 30 of the Constitutive Act); and
- c) an obligation to be bound by PSC decisions to cooperate with and facilitate PSC action on conflict prevention, management and resolution.

The institutional component comprises the structures for peace and security decision-making and implementation. Article 2 of the Protocol lists these as the [Continental Early Warning System](#), the Panel of the Wise, the [AU's mediation architecture](#), the African Standby Force and the Peace Fund, all of which are anchored on the PSC.

The key institutional components of the African Peace and Security Architecture



Yet the record of implementation is poor. [Early warning](#) struggles to translate into early action. [Mediation](#) has been seen to arrive after mass atrocities rather than before. As recently noted by El Ghassim Wane in his briefing to the Peace and Security Council, on the continent “[we are witnessing the persistence—and in some cases escalation—of conflicts and tensions across Africa.](#)” As extensively documented in, among others, [the review of the PSC for 2025](#), the PSC did not garner a meaningful level of influence in either limiting the dynamics of conflicts on its agenda or in shaping peace processes relating to those conflict situations. As a result, the PSC and the AU are ignored or otherwise displaced. Such is the case in Sudan, South Sudan, the Sahel and the DRC, having been [constrained](#), among others, by political dynamics that prioritise Member State sovereignty over timely intervention. Prevention has been chronically underfunded relative to crisis response.

This persistent gap is [not due to the absence of tools](#). Rather, as highlighted in current policy debates and various analyses, what accounts for the gaps, in addition to changes in the dynamics of conflicts, are the absence or weaknesses of the mechanics and processes that should activate those tools, compounded by leadership and political factors that hinder their effective deployment. Five structural constraints stand out:

1. **Crisis of leadership:** the exercise and mobilization of leadership through taking initiative by being seized with proactive measures and initiating preventive and peace-making intervention, both on the part of member states and the AU Commission, were critical in the cases where the AU registered relative success in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in earlier eras. In recent years, the AU, both at the level of the Commission and member states, faces a major crisis of leadership as it struggles to be the first to be seized with and activate peace and security initiatives and facilitate complementary and joint action by all critical actors.

2. **Political will deficits:** in a context of deepening mistrust and weak initiative for consensus building for collective action, Member States have increasingly resisted AU early action on grounds of sovereignty and non-interference, even where the Constitutive Act provides clear normative authority.
3. **Structural under-resourcing:** Prevention is consistently underfunded relative to peace operations, in part because its outcomes are difficult to measure and attribute. Donors have historically preferred visible, deployable responses. The AU's own prevention mechanisms operate on limited and unpredictable funding.
4. **The changing nature of conflict:** The conflicts the AU's prevention architecture was designed to address - primarily interstate and intrastate armed conflict with identifiable parties and clear escalation ladders - have given way to more complex, fragmented, and protracted forms of violence.
5. There is a fifth constraint that receives far less attention but is equally consequential: the AU's conflict prevention architecture is designed exclusively for state and institutional actors. **Communities - the people closest to conflict, most exposed to its early warning signs, and most directly affected by its consequences - are structurally invisible** within APSA, CEWS, and the broader prevention framework.

This is not a peripheral oversight. It is a design flaw with serious operational consequences.

In practice, much of what actually prevents conflict from escalating happens at the community level. Local peace committees negotiate access and civilian protection in the absence of any formal mechanism. Traditional authorities and religious leaders mediate inter-communal tensions before they reach the threshold of AU or UN attention. Women's networks monitor protection risks and sustain social cohesion under conditions of active violence. Inter-communal dialogue processes maintain lines of communication between communities that formal political processes have abandoned.

The consequences are twofold. First, the AU's prevention architecture misses the most proximate and often most reliable signals of conflict risk. Second, it fails to support and sustain the prevention work that communities are already doing.

The Opportunity

The extraordinary summit creates a rare political opening. It signals that AU Member States are prepared to have a frank conversation about failure and reform. If, as it promises, it focuses on effective action and follow-up, it will catalyze the dynamics for restoration of AU's role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. That opening should not be used simply to reaffirm existing commitments. It should be used to make the case for structural change, including a fundamentally renewed approach to both the AU-UN prevention partnership and the relationship between formal prevention architecture and the communities it is meant to serve.

Questions for Dialogue

1. Why has AU conflict prevention and resolution underperformed?

A frank assessment of the political, institutional, and resource constraints that have prevented the AU's prevention architecture from functioning as designed, including an honest engagement with the sovereignty and political will dynamics that have most consistently blocked early action.

2. Who is doing prevention, and are we looking in the right places?

An examination of where conflict prevention actually happens in practice, including the role of community structures, traditional authorities, women's networks, and local mediation processes, and what it would mean to formally recognise and resource these actors within continental prevention architecture.

3. How to create the conditions for political will and exercise of leadership?

What measures and/or changes should be adopted at the level of member states, at the level of the PSC, and at the level of the AU Commission to reenergize conflict prevention and resolution?

4. What should the extraordinary summit commit to?

Given the political moment the summit represents, what are the concrete, measurable commitments that would signal genuine structural change? Specifically: what would it take to formally integrate community-level prevention into the AU's continental architecture, and is there political will to do so?

5. How do we address the financing gap?

Prevention is structurally underfunded at every level - continental, national, and community. What financing instruments could be better directed toward AU prevention mechanisms and toward the community-based structures that sustain prevention work on the ground? What would it take to shift donor behaviour from crisis response toward sustained prevention investment?