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DRAFT PROPOSAL

AFRICAN UNION TRIGGER MODEL FOR EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE

PROPOSED AFRICAN UNION TRIGGER MODEL FOR EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE

I. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1. The African Union (AU), through various Peace and Security Council (PSC) communiqués and policy frameworks, has repeatedly emphasized the imperative to strengthen the linkage between early warning and early response within the twin pillars of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).
2. Despite improvements in the implementation of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), African Union Conflict Prevention Framework (AU CPF) and other preventive tools, responses to emerging crises by AU Organs, structures and mechanisms often remain unwieldy, chronically delayed, reactive or inconsistent.
3. The 11th PSC Cairo Retreat on Enhancing the Linkage between Early Warning and Early response, held on 29 October 2018, specifically called for the development of “trigger mechanisms and indicators” to facilitate timely preventive action. This was reiterated during the 1251st PSC Meeting on Enhancing CEWS and Early response, the 1298th PSC on the Continental Early Warning System: “Mapping Risks and Threats,” which called for the establishment and institutionalization of a dynamic and continuously updated Risk Mapping Tool to provide a consolidated picture of threats, vulnerabilities and potential triggers, and the Dar es Salaam Declaration on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa (May 2024), all of which emphasized translating early warning analysis into practical and predictable responses.
4. Policy analysis by the AUC identified the absence of predefined thresholds and response protocols as a major gap undermining preventive diplomacy and timely intervention.
5. Against this background, the proposed AU Trigger Model seeks to establish a graduated framework of triggers, thresholds, and response options capable of guiding timely and proportionate AU engagement before situations escalate into violent conflict, unconstitutional changes of government, humanitarian crises, or mass atrocities.
6. The model is intended to function as a decision-influencing/support system of the AUPSC rather than an automatic intervention tool, linking warning indicators to predefined AU response pathways through existing AGA–APSA mechanisms.
7. The AU Trigger Model should be understood as complementary to, and not duplicative of, the Continental Threat and Risk Mapping Tool and other existing AU early warning instruments. While the Mapping Tool provides a dynamic picture of nature, location, evolution and interconnection of threats and risks across the continent, the Trigger Model provides the decision-support framework through which relevant early warning information can be assessed against defined thresholds and linked to proportionate AU response options. In practical terms, the Mapping Tool helps identify and track what and where risks are emerging or evolving, while the Trigger Model assists in determining the level of concern and what form of AU engagement may be appropriate. The two tools therefore perform distinct but mutually reinforcing functions within the broader AU conflict prevention and early warning architecture.
8. (In operationalizing this Model, the AU shall continue to act in accordance with the principles of the Constitutive Act, including Articles 4(g) and 4(h), and other relevant legal instruments. The Trigger Model does not determine the application of these provisions; rather, it serves as a technical

early warning and decision-support tool that provides objective and evidence-based analysis to support and inform the decision-making process of the PSC and other competent AU organs.

II. AU TRIGGER MODEL LEVELS

9. The proposed Trigger Model is designed around Four (4) graduated threat levels:

Levels

- | 1 | Minimal
- | 2 | Elevated
- | 3 | Significant
- | 4 | Critical/Emergency

10. Each level is linked to corresponding AU responses.

11. The model recognizes that risk escalation is often preceded by observable threshold indicators, including governance deterioration, acute constitutional disputes, political gridlock, gross human rights violations, armed mobilization, humanitarian crises of immense proportions, climate-related shocks, natural disasters, miss management and illegal exploitation, major public health emergencies and the lack of State capacity to protect civilians as well as other governance peace and security related issues.

12. It is important to note that the escalation pathway should not be understood as strictly linear or sequential.

13. Empirical evidence drawing from previous AU experiences in conflict prevention, crisis management and response demonstrates that situations may bypass early warning levels entirely, escalate rapidly across multiple levels within a short period, or alternate between phases of de-escalation and renewed crisis.

14. The Model therefore provides for:

- i. rapid-level escalation where conditions deteriorate abruptly;
- ii. deliberate de-escalation with corresponding reduction in AU engagement intensity as situations stabilize; and
- iii. re-escalation protocols where previously stabilized situations deteriorate again.
- iv. The absence of a de-escalation and re-entry pathway risks locking the AU into either premature disengagement or indefinite crisis posture, both of which carry significant institutional and diplomatic costs.

III. PROPOSED OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS

15. The Trigger Model may be operationalized through the following components:

a) Trigger Categories (Types)

16. Triggers should be developed around key risk domains, including but not limited to:

- i. **Governance deficit:** Governance deficit and constitutional order; Democratic elections and political transitions; Hate speech and social cohesion risks; Peace agreement

- implementation risks, where governance-related (Indicators such as Governance, elections, political transitions, constitutional disputes, political transitions, social-cohesion risks;
- ii. **Renewed cold war-like geopolitical and ideological competition;** Security threats and military-related and Security Sector Reform and Constitutional Crisis (SRCCs) crisis as well as Cross-border and regional spillover (indicators such as external interference, proxy dynamics, foreign forces/fighters and geopolitical competition etc.)
 - iii. **Exponential growth of terrorism, violent extremism and transnational organized crime, especially human trafficking and the proliferation of weapons, as well as maritime Insecurity/piracy across the five (5) regions of the continent:** Terrorism and violent extremism, including insurgency/insurrection/Non-State Armed Group activities (Indicators such as terrorism, violent extremism, insurgency, organized crime, human trafficking, weapons proliferation and maritime insecurity/piracy.
 - iv. **Unprecedented Inter-State tensions and disputes:** border/territorial disputes, interstate military deployments, cross-border incidents, diplomatic deterioration and regional spillover beneath it
 - v. **Resurgence of Unconstitutional Changes of Government:** coup risks/attempts, military interference in politics, suspension/dissolution of constitutional institutions and breakdown of constitutional order.
 - vi. **Youth Restiveness resulting from political exclusion and structural unemployment:** Hate speech; Economic shocks and instability (youth political exclusion, structural unemployment, youth-led unrest/protests, recruitment into violent groups and associated social tensions)
 - vii. **Post Covid-19 Pandemic cascading effects of economic crises and unsustainable external debts:** Economic shocks and instability; Major public health crisis and widespread pandemic (economic deterioration indicators and explicitly add debt distress, fiscal pressures, inflation/unemployment and cascading socio-economic effects)
 - viii. **Prolonged Humanitarian crises, forced displacement and the weaponization of sexual/gender-based violence:** Human rights violations; Civilian protection and humanitarian risks; Cross-border and regional spillover (humanitarian, human-rights and civilian-protection indicators and explicitly include forced displacement, refugee flows and weaponization of SGBV)
 - ix. **Acute competition for natural resources and climate Insecurity as threat-multiplier:** Climate change impact and major natural disasters; Security and Cross-border/regional spillover (climate/natural-disaster indicators and explicitly include competition over land, water and other natural resources and related communal/cross-border tensions)
 - x. **New technologies and cybersecurity** (cyberattack, cyber-enabled destabilization, malicious use of AI/emerging technologies, technology-enabled disinformation and attacks on critical digital infrastructure)

b) Sources of Evidence

17. The Trigger Model activation shall inform through multiple AU and its Organs/Institutions as well as relevant mechanisms including the AU Panel of the Wise, APRM, AfCHPR, ACHPR and ACERWC.
18. The threat levels within the Trigger Model will be determined by information sourced for the attention of the AUPSC and Chairperson of the AUC, from:
 - i. PAPS Department monitoring; CEWS alerts and risk analysis;
 - ii. Country Peace and Resilience Assessment (CPRA) findings;
 - iii. Continental Security Cartography as a decision support tool for prevention and early warning;

- iv. APRM governance assessments;
- v. Official reports from Member States concerned;
- vi. AU field missions and Liaison offices and Permanent Observer Missions and SRCCs;
- vii. AUCTC & AFRIPOL threat assessments;
- viii. ACHPR monitoring and human rights reporting;
- ix. CISSA intelligence and security assessments;
- x. REC/RM reporting;
- xi. Humanitarian and protection data including from the African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA);
- xii. Alerts and documented information submitted by UN bodies and associated global agencies;
- xiii. Mediation and political engagement reports.
- xiv. African Continental Civilian Capacity Mechanism for Disaster Preparedness and Response (3CMDPR)
- xv. And other sources in line with the decision of Member States

c) Response Protocols

19. Each trigger level could correspond to predefined and coordinated response pathways involving the AU, RECs/RMs, and appropriate, relevant United Nations entities, in accordance with their respective mandates and comparative advantages, to promote consistency, complementarity and predictability in preventive action.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL AU RESPONSE PATHWAYS

20. The Trigger Model seeks to activate existing AU instruments rather than create new structures.

21. Possible AU response actors include:

- i. AU Assembly;
- ii. AU Chairperson;
- iii. Executive Council;
- iv. AUC Chairperson;
- v. Peace and Security Council (PSC) and its supportive mechanisms (Panel of the Wise and its subsidiary mechanisms, ASF, Peace Fund, etc)
- vi. Relevant AUC Departments, AU Organs and Entities
- vii. AU relevant agencies and mechanisms (RECs/RMs;
- viii. UN Security Council and other relevant partners (where necessary).

V. AU THREAT ESCALATION MATRIX

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
LEVEL 1 – Minimal	Governance • Isolated incidents of political or institutional tension. • Early signs of declining public confidence in institutions (early indications of a weakening social contract). • Limited deficiencies in public service delivery.	• Closer CEWS monitoring and continuous information gathering. • Periodic reporting, trend analysis and risk assessment. • Continued engagement and information-sharing with the concerned Member State and relevant RECs/RMs. • Increased field monitoring and verification through AU Liaison Offices

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
	• Low-level concerns regarding constitutionalism, rule of law or accountability. Socio-economic • Manageable socio-economic pressures. • Unequal distribution of wealth or growing perceptions of inequality. • Localized livelihood pressures. • Limited unemployment or cost-of-living concerns. Social Cohesion • Low-level community grievances. • Emerging tensions between communities. • Early signs of erosion of trust between citizens and State institutions. Security • Isolated security incidents. • Localized criminal or extremist activity with limited impact. Humanitarian • Limited humanitarian concerns. Environment and Natural Resources • Localized climate or health-related stress with limited impact. • Early indications of illegal exploitation of natural resources with localized implications. Early Warning Assessment • Indicators requiring closer observation. • Emerging inflammatory rhetoric. • Misinformation/disinformation. • Unusual mobilization. • Emerging constitutional or political tensions.	and Situation Room Coordination Centres (SRCCs), where present. • Preventive awareness, confidence-building and early preventive engagement, where appropriate. • Institutional preparedness and coordination with relevant AU organs, departments and specialized agencies, where appropriate. • Lead: AU Commission (PAPS/CMD/CEWS) • Coordination: relevant REC/RM, AU Liaison Office (where present), relevant AU organs and specialized agencies, and, where appropriate, relevant United Nations entities acting within their respective mandates.

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
LEVEL 2 – Elevated	Governance • Repeated public protests. • Governance deficit and deterioration. • Civic restrictions. • Institutional tensions. • Political polarization. • Weakening public trust in institutions. • Delays or disputes relating to constitutional, electoral or political processes. • Emerging territorial or boundary tensions managed through peaceful means. Socio-economic • Economic shocks and inflation pressures. • Food insecurity indicators. • Rising unemployment and livelihood pressures. • Increasing inequalities and socio-economic grievances. • Persistent disruptions in basic public service delivery. Social Cohesion • Inflammatory rhetoric. • Misinformation and hate speech trends. • Localized communal tensions. • Growing identity-based tensions. • Increasing mistrust between communities. Security • Increased criminality and social instability. • Recurring localized security incidents. • Increasing activity of armed, extremist or violent groups with localized impact. • Localized border security incidents or cross-border tensions. Human Rights • Rising human rights concerns. • Increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms.	• Enhanced CEWS monitoring and expanded information gathering. • Country-specific reporting and risk assessment. • Consultations with the Chairperson of the Commission and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, as appropriate. • Engagement with the concerned Member State and relevant RECs/RMs. • Increased field monitoring and verification, including through AU Liaison Offices and SRCCs, where present. • Quiet diplomacy, preventive messaging and confidence-building measures, where appropriate. • Technical advisory support and coordination with relevant humanitarian and human rights actors, where appropriate. • Early consultations with relevant AU organs, departments and mechanisms, as appropriate. • Notification of the AU Peace and Security Council, where appropriate. Institutional Arrangements Lead: AU Commission (PAPS/CMD/CEWS) Coordination: relevant REC/RM; AU Liaison Office and SRCC, where present; relevant AU organs, departments and specialized agencies; and, where appropriate, relevant United Nations entities and other partners acting within their respective mandates.

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
	• Reports of arbitrary arrests, intimidation or excessive use of force requiring closer monitoring. • Increasing incidents affecting women, children and other vulnerable groups. Humanitarian • Early signs of humanitarian stress. • Localized displacement. • Increasing humanitarian needs affecting vulnerable populations. • Public health concerns requiring sustained national response. Environment and Natural Resources • Climate-related stress. • Increasing competition over natural resources. • Illegal exploitation or unsustainable management of natural resources. • Environmental degradation affecting livelihoods and local stability.	
LEVEL 3 – Significant	Governance • Constitutional disputes and political order stress. • Election-related tensions. • Political deadlock affecting governance. • Delays in the implementation of peace agreements or political settlements. • Severe political polarization. • Suppression of civic and political actors. • Breakdown of constitutional, political or mediation processes. Socio-economic • Severe economic shocks affecting national stability. • Food insecurity escalation. • Major disruptions in essential public service delivery.	• Preventive diplomacy missions, where appropriate. • Direct engagement of the Panel of the Wise (PoW), FemWise-Africa and WiseYouth through the Mediation and Dialogue Division (MDD). • Consultations with the concerned Member State and relevant RECs/RMs. • Good Offices of the Chairperson of the Commission, where appropriate. • PSC consultations and briefings, as appropriate. • Targeted AU political and diplomatic engagement. • Fact-finding, assessment and verification missions, where appropriate. • Confidence-building initiatives and support to mediation and dialogue processes. • Enhanced humanitarian coordination and protection planning.

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
	Widespread socio-economic grievances contributing to instability.	- Early contingency planning and response coordination. - Coordination with relevant AU organs, departments and specialized agencies, as appropriate. - Continued monitoring, analysis and field reporting, including through AU Liaison Offices and SRCCs, where present.
	Social Cohesion - Escalating protests. - Increased hate speech and incitement. - Deepening inter-community or identity-based tensions. - Widespread erosion of public trust in State institutions.	Institutional Arrangements Lead: AU Commission (PAPS/CMD), including the Mediation and Dialogue Division (MDD), where appropriate. Coordination: relevant REC/RM; AU Liaison Office and SRCC, where present; relevant AU organs, departments and specialized agencies (including ACHPR, APRM, CISSA, AUCTC, AFRIPOL, AU CDC and others as appropriate); and, where appropriate, relevant United Nations entities and other partners acting within their respective mandates.
	Security - Armed mobilization. - Force deployments. - Terrorism warnings. - Terrorist or Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) attacks. - Heightened Transnational Organized Crime (TNOC). - Cross-border tensions. - Increased attacks against civilians or security forces. - Increasing localized territorial or boundary tensions with security implications.	
	Human Rights - Worsening human rights situation. - Targeted violence. - Serious restrictions on civic and political space. - Increasing violations affecting women, children and other vulnerable groups.	
	Humanitarian - Increased displacement. - Deterioration in humanitarian indicators. - Public health alerts with security implications. - Humanitarian needs exceeding national response capacity. - Humanitarian access constraints.	

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
	Environment and Natural Resources • Major climate shocks or disasters affecting stability. • Large-scale environmental degradation affecting livelihoods and security. • Intensified competition over natural resources contributing to instability. • Large-scale illegal exploitation of natural resources contributing to conflict or insecurity.	

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
LEVEL 4 – Critical /Emergency	Governance - Major disruption or complete breakdown of the constitutional order. - Coup d'état, attempted coup d'état, or imminent coup risks. - Collapse or paralysis of legitimate State institutions. - Breakdown of peace agreements or ceasefire arrangements. - Inability of State institutions to exercise effective authority.	- Emergency consultations within the African Union, as appropriate. - Emergency consultations and sessions of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), where required. - High-level political engagement, including the Good Offices of the Chairperson of the Commission. - Deployment of Special Envoys, High Representatives and mediation support, where appropriate. - Intensified engagement of the Panel of the Wise (PoW), FemWise-Africa and WiseYouth through the Mediation and Dialogue Division (MDD). - Coordination with the concerned Member State, relevant RECs/RMs and other regional mechanisms. - Activation of humanitarian coordination and civilian protection measures, where appropriate. - Coordination with relevant AU organs, departments and specialized agencies. - Support for ceasefire negotiations, stabilization initiatives and other conflict management efforts, where appropriate. - Consultations and coordination with the United Nations and other international partners, where appropriate. - Contingency planning for stabilization, peace support operations or other measures, in accordance with relevant AU instruments and decisions. - Early planning for post-conflict stabilization, reconstruction and development (PCRD), where appropriate. - Consideration of the mobilization of relevant Peace Fund windows and other available AU resources, where appropriate.
	Socio-economic - Collapse of essential public services and national protection systems. - Widespread famine conditions or severe socio-economic collapse. - Major disruption of critical national infrastructure. - Severe disruption of livelihoods affecting large segments of the population.	
	Social Cohesion - Widespread communal or identity-based violence. - Systematic targeting of vulnerable populations. - Severe societal fragmentation and collapse of community cohesion. - Widespread incitement or mobilization leading to mass violence.	
	Security - Major armed clashes or widespread armed conflict. - Rapid escalation of insurgency, violent extremism or terrorist activity. - Major terrorist or Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) territorial control.	Institutional Arrangements Lead: AU Commission (Chairperson and PAPS), under the guidance of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), as appropriate. Coordination: Concerned Member State; relevant REC/RM; AU Liaison Office and

Threat Level	Indicative Threshold Indicators	AU Response
	• Significant cross-border spillover threatening regional stability. • Serious border or territorial disputes involving the use or threat of force. • Complete breakdown of public order.	Situation Room Coordination Centre (SRCC), where present; relevant AU organs, departments and specialized agencies (including MDD, PCRD, ACHPR, CISSA, AUCTC, AFRIPOL, AU CDC, AfHA and others as appropriate); and, where appropriate, the United Nations and other international partners acting within their respective mandates.
	Human Rights • Serious or widespread human rights violations. • Widespread attacks against civilians. • Mass atrocity risks, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. • Large-scale violations of international humanitarian or human rights law.	
	Humanitarian • Catastrophic humanitarian crisis. • Massive displacement and refugee flows. • Obstruction or denial of humanitarian access. • Major health emergencies affecting national stability. • Humanitarian needs far exceeding national response capacity.	
	Environment and Natural Resources • Catastrophic natural disasters or environmental emergencies with nationwide or regional implications. • Large-scale environmental degradation contributing to widespread instability. • Competition over strategic natural resources directly fuelling armed conflict.	

VI. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

22. The Model shall serve:

- i. as an open/accountable decision-influencing support framework;
- ii. to complement existing AU and REC/RM conflict prevention frameworks;
- iii. to combine structural indicators (governance deficits, exclusion, economic shocks) with proximate indicators (armed mobilization, electoral violence, displacement);
- iv. to promote predictable and timely responses to emerging threats;
- v. as periodical review instrument for lessons learned and evolving threats;
- vi. to strengthen coherence between AGA and APSA frameworks.

23. In addition, implementation of the Trigger Model should ensure interoperability and complementarity with the Continental Threat and Risk Mapping Tool, CEWS and other relevant AU analytical mechanisms, ensuring that their respective functions are mutually reinforced while avoiding parallel assessment processes or duplication of existing functions.

VII. ILLUSTRATIVE BASIS FOR THE FRAMEWORK

24. The threshold indicators are informed by historical patterns observed in situations previously considered by AU organs, where delayed preventive engagement contributed to escalation.

25. Experiences related to governance crises, peace agreement implementation delays, unconstitutional changes of government, armed conflicts, terrorism and violent extremism, humanitarian deterioration, climate-related shocks, health emergencies, and civilian protection challenges demonstrate the need for predefined thresholds linked to graduated AU responses.

26. The AU Model therefore seeks to institutionalize a more predictable transition from warning to action, reducing delayed responses and strengthening preventive diplomacy.

VIII. COORDINATION BETWEEN AU AND MEMBER STATES FOR EFFECTIVE EARLY RESPONSE:

27. The comprehensive implementation of the AU Trigger Model for Early Warning and Early response needs a critical prerequisite for effective action in Africa's peace and security landscape. The development of a robust coordination plan between the AU and its Member States is also important to build robust synergies among all AU actors. Such a plan is essential to ensure timely decision-making, coherent responses, operational relevance, resource efficiency, and successful conflict prevention outcomes. Strengthened coordination would enable the effective translation of early warning into early response and enhance the overall performance of the APSA.

28. To maximize the impact of early response, the AUC and Member States should establish a unified real-time information-sharing mechanism within the CEWS, through National Early Warning and Response mechanisms. By integrating continental, regional, and national early warning structures, stakeholders can maintain a common understanding of emerging risks and ensure that early warning signals are rapidly communicated to all relevant actors.

29. The coordination plan should also include pre-agreed mechanisms between AU and MS for preventive diplomacy and rapid response. This would allow the timely deployment of mediation, dialogue, and stabilization initiatives that enable swift response before situations deteriorate into full-scale crises.

30. Finally, a clear division of responsibilities between the AU, RECs/RMs, and Member States should be complemented in the AU trigger model by regular joint simulation exercises. Leveraging the comparative advantages of each actor while testing coordination and decision-making procedures will strengthen preparedness and ensure more effective and agile responses to emerging threats.

IX. PROPOSED NEXT STEPS: JULY TO AUGUST 2026

- i. Develop a draft AU Trigger Matrix and escalation protocol linked to AGA and APSA mechanisms;
- ii. Submit to AUC, CCP and CDCP for inputs and comments;
- iii. Undertake technical consultations with CEWS, APRM, AUCTC, ACHPR, Afripol, CISSA, RECs/RMs, MDD and other relevant AU entities including AUPSC CoE, IRECKE and NeTT4Peace, as well as AU organs/ Institutions and AUC Departments; HHS, ARBEA, Africa CDC
- iv. Pilot the Model using selected historical case studies to examine patterns of escalation, response timelines and the suitability of proposed response options, with a view to refining the operational application of the Model. Submit recommendations to PSC CoE and MSC for consideration;
- v. Institutionalize the model through AGA–APSA integration and operational procedures’ prism, including regular review and refinement.
- vi. Consideration by AU PSC;
- vii. Endorsement by Extraordinary Summit of Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union on 29-30 August 2026 in Luanda, Angola.