

POLICY BRIEF

SUDAN'S CRISIS IS AFRICA'S CRISIS— AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY

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INTRODUCTION

Sudan is now the epicenter of one of the world's deadliest conflicts and most desperate humanitarian crises. The numbers speak for themselves: since 2023, more than [150,000](#) people are estimated to have died as a result of violence and other related causes, 7.3 million have been newly internally displaced—on top of 2.3 million already displaced, bringing the total 9.6 million, 4.3 million have fled as refugees to neighboring countries, and more than 30 million people—two-thirds of the population—require humanitarian assistance ([here](#)). The atrocities committed defy words, and the battle for El-Fasher—its fall to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the unbearable reports that followed—has revived the darkest echoes of an earlier tragedy: the scorched-earth campaign waged in Darfur following the 2003 armed rebellion in that region. The fear now is stark: what happened there could happen again, elsewhere.

This is not the path Sudanese imagined in April 2019. Their revolution, which started with a series of popular protests five months earlier, captured the world's attention and inspired millions across Africa. It brought to an end three decades of rule by the National Congress Party (NCP), against a backdrop of conflict that spanned what was then Southern Sudan, the 'Two Areas' of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and, of course, Darfur. Today, as Sudan unravels, it is only natural to ask what derailed that moment of hope, where responsibility lies, and what could have been done differently. But this should be for another day. The urgency now is to stop the violence and give the Sudanese people the respite they so desperately need.

PAST EXPERIENCE, PRESENT CHALLENGES

In thinking about how to move forward, it is useful to revisit the wisdom of the 2008 African Union High-Level Panel on Darfur (AUPD). In its October 2009 report—[Darfur: The Quest for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation](#)—submitted to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, the Panel recalled that Africa took the first initiative to assume responsibility for peace and protection in Darfur, by convening ceasefire talks and peace negotiations, dispatching peacekeepers, and demanding accountability, concluding: '*When the attention of the international community turns elsewhere, Africa will still be engaged ... It cannot be otherwise because Darfur's crisis is also Africa's crisis.*'

The truth today is that the international community has not entirely looked away—there are regular discussions at the Security Council and several diplomatic initiatives have been taken. But its response has fallen tragically short: to take one example, only 36.3 of the \$4.2 billion Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2025 have been mobilised, and slightly less than a quarter of the \$1.8 billion required to support people who have sought refuge in neighboring countries has been received. Yet the essence of the Panel's message still stands: whatever others do or fail to do, Africa carries a particular responsibility—moral, political, and strategic—that no one else can discharge for the continent. The situation in Sudan is deeply alarming and should leave no African indifferent; no informed African can remain silent in the face of this tragedy.

In 2004 (and in the years that followed), we were involved in the collective effort to shape the AU's response to the atrocities unfolding in Darfur, working with colleagues in the Peace and Security Department, under the leadership of then AU Commission Chairperson Alpha Oumar Konaré. It was a defining moment in the AU's early life: the Union had only been launched in July 2002, and the Peace and Security Council's founding protocol had entered into force eighteen months later. In the [Statement of Commitment to Peace and Security in Africa](#) adopted at the PSC's launch, in May 2004 in Addis Ababa, African leaders pledged that Africa would never again shrink from its responsibilities; that it would speak first, act early; and—when grave human rights abuses occur—be the first to condemn and the first to respond.

The Commission sought to build on that early momentum to ensure the AU moved as quickly and effectively as possible. It worked with Chad to secure a humanitarian ceasefire on 8 April 2004 and, by late May, negotiated its operational modalities. On 9 June, the AU deployed its first military observers to Darfur—a mission that eventually grew to some 8,000 uniformed personnel before transitioning in December 2007 into UNAMID, the joint AU-UN operation, and which the Commission had to manage under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, with limited prior experience and severe financial and logistical constraints. On 20–21 June, the Chairperson of the Commission travelled to Khartoum, several locations in Darfur, and a refugee camp in eastern Chad for a first-hand assessment. In parallel, the Commission launched a public website to expose ceasefire violations and abuses—an early push for accountability.

Politically, the AU efforts were equally relentless, if frustrating. In July 2004, the Commission initiated a process that led to the 2006 Abuja Peace Agreement—regrettably never implemented. A similar fate awaited subsequent efforts by AU and United Nations (UN) envoys in 2007–2008, as well as the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur facilitated by a joint AU-UN mediator. In July 2008, after the application by the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor for a warrant of arrest against President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, the PSC, upon recommendation from the Commission, endorsed the establishment of a high-level panel on Darfur to examine the situation and make recommendations on how best accountability and combating impunity, on one hand, and reconciliation and healing, on the other, could be pursued in a mutually supportive way. The AUPD, later transformed into the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), which went on, together with the Commission and the support of several partners, including the UN, to lead what remains undoubtedly the AU's most ambitious mediation effort to date. Its work tackled not only Darfur but also Sudan's broader democratization challenges and its fraught relations with South Sudan. This was accompanied by sustained attention at the level of the PSC: [data compiled by Amani Africa](#) shows that, between 2004 and mid-2023, Sudan was the issue most frequently considered by the PSC.

The AU did not get everything right—far from it. And no doubt, there were additional steps that could have been taken to deliver more tangibly for the people of Sudan. Still, its engagement, alongside others, was not without effect and contributed, in some measure, to alleviating civilian suffering and

supporting efforts toward a political solution addressing both the Darfur crisis and Sudan's wider instability. The task was anything but easy. The organization faced constant roadblocks—from the government, from armed movements, and, as stressed above, from the chronic financial and capacity constraints that hampered the deployment and sustainment of the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS). One lesson was clear: even in a highly constrained environment, there is always agency—and one way to harness it is for the AU to persist and fully leverage its own norms and policies to create entry points and overcome resistance.

The context today is different. The AU Commission and the PSC itself now confront an even more complex landscape, not least the heavy involvement of non-African actors and the rivalries that further narrow the AU's margin for action. To its credit, the AU—both its Commission and the PSC—has made numerous strong statements and invested considerable effort in Sudan: establishing the Expanded Mechanism for the Resolution of the Sudan Crisis, adopting a Roadmap, deploying a High-Level Panel on Sudan led by Mohammed Ibn Chambas, setting-up a PSC Presidential ad hoc Committee, and consistently advocating for humanitarian ceasefires and inclusive political dialogue. But Sudan is collapsing before our eyes, and its people cannot endure much more. The AU should therefore seek to further strengthen its engagement, making fuller use of the tools already at its disposal. In this regard, Africans more broadly have a responsibility to stand behind the Union's efforts and, where possible, to contribute ideas that may help reinforce its action in an exceptionally constrained environment.

TOWARD AN ENHANCED AFRICAN ACTION

Sudan's agony will not end on its own. It requires leadership—African leadership. It is against this backdrop that the following proposals (essentially practical modalities for implementing existing decisions) could be considered for how the AU might strengthen its ongoing push for an early cessation of hostilities—a step that could open the way for a political process under the leadership of the UN, the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the League of Arab States, based on the respect of Sudan's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as on the country's democratic transformation and the fulfillment of its people's aspirations to good governance. These proposals are developed on the assumption that AU engagement should reinforce ongoing initiatives led by the UN, whose Personal Envoy, Ramtane Lamamra, convened proximity talks in July 2024 and has since continued to encourage the parties to move towards de-escalation, and the Quad, including the renewed efforts by the United States and Saudi Arabia to achieve a humanitarian truce. The aim is simple: to increase the pressure on the parties and secure the cooperation required to stop the fighting and the attacks on civilians and on civilian infrastructure.

a) To begin with, the PSC may wish to consider making a formal determination on whether the threshold under Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act has been reached. Article 4(h) affirms the Union's right to intervene in a Member State in cases of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. These conditions are not cumulative; each, if materially established, provides an independent

legal basis for intervention. By any reasonable standard, Sudan meets—at a minimum—the threshold of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

[The July 2025 report of the Virtual Joint Fact-Finding Mission on the Human Rights Situation in the Sudan](#), undertaken by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) together with the AU Commission, describes a conflict defined by massive, systematic violations: indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure; arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings; rampant sexual violence; the killing and recruitment of children; widespread looting; and the deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid. The FFM also identifies a pattern of ethnically-motivated violence and a 'flagrant disregard for life,' in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law and the fundamental principles of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and of the AU Constitutive Act. Its conclusion is clear: the Sudanese people have carried the full weight of this war, and the continuation of hostilities will only deepen the suffering unless a political and justice process is urgently reignited. The PSC itself has repeatedly voiced grave concern, including in its communiqués of [21 June 2024](#), and of [4 August, 28 October](#) and [16 December 2025](#).

A PSC determination under Article 4(h), to be made following consultations with all relevant stakeholders, would not be a mere procedural step. It would signal that the situation is of exceptional gravity, that the AU and its Member States cannot treat it as business as usual, and that the PSC acknowledges both the legal obligations and the moral urgency the Constitutive Act imposes.

Legally, such a determination would trigger the right—indeed the duty—of the Union to intervene, including through the deployment of a force to stop atrocity crimes, upon authorization by the Assembly of Heads of States and Government. In practice, however, the AU currently lacks the logistical and financial capacity to mount such an operation, not to speak of other related challenges—a situation that is highly unlikely to change anytime soon. The gap is therefore real. But should it prevent the PSC from making the determination?

In fact, acknowledging that the Article 4(h) threshold has been crossed would have important political value: it raises the alarm, further clarifies the gravity of the situation for all Member States, strengthens the AU's hand in diplomacy, and signals to the parties—and to external actors—that Africa considers the status quo unacceptable. It also reaffirms a core principle of the AU's founding vision: that atrocity crimes on the continent demand an African response, even when the tools for intervention are constrained.

b) Against this backdrop, the establishment of a remote monitoring mechanism would respond to the need to track developments on the ground, document attacks on civilians, and identify perpetrators whenever possible, in line with relevant PSC pronouncements, including its communiqué of 16 December which called for the intensification of efforts to document atrocities. This would not require a large or expensive operation. It can be built from existing AU bodies working together: the ACHPR, the Office of the Special Envoy on the Prevention of Genocide and Other Mass Atrocities, the Committee of Experts on the Rights and

Welfare of the Child, and the Office of the AU Envoy on Women, Peace and Security.

Mandated by the PSC, this mechanism would function as an independent structure, producing bi-weekly or monthly reports to the PSC and informing the Commission. Independence is essential: it ensures credibility, protects the process from political interference, and shields the mediation efforts by the Commission and the High-Level Panel, as well as by IGAD, from backlash by the parties. In that, it differs from the arrangement envisaged by the PSC in its communiqué of 21 June 2024, which referred to relevant AU organs—not specifically named—mandated to monitor the situation and report on crimes committed, in collaboration with the High-Level Panel on Sudan and IGAD.

The reports of the proposed mechanism would be public, creating a measure of accountability, hopefully deterring further abuses, and giving victims' experiences continental and international visibility. They would also provide the PSC with authoritative information to guide its decisions, while allowing the AU Commission to use verified findings in their engagements with the parties and other stakeholders.

c) Alongside the establishment of the above-mentioned mechanism, renewed consideration could be given to the possible deployment of a protection-focused mission in Sudan. The PSC has already requested options, including in its communiqué of 28 October. The time is now to shape them, with the assistance of the UN, which brings a depth of experience and expertise in peacekeeping unmatched by any other organization. Such a mission could combine in a

gradual fashion several of the models already identified in the October 2024 [Independent Study on the Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities](#), commissioned by the UN Department of Peace Operations in the context of the Ministerial Conference on Peacekeeping held in Berlin in May 2025: protection of civilians, ceasefire monitoring and observation, support to accountability mechanisms, mine action/explosive ordnance removal, humanitarian accompaniment, protection of cultural heritage, natural resources and critical infrastructure, border management, and city-level security arrangements, among others.

For this to be credible, the AU Commission may wish to assemble a team comprising technical experts and led at a very senior level, to engage all the relevant actors: the Government of Sudan, the RSF, and the civilian opposition, as well as the countries of the region, members of the UN Security Council, the UN Secretariat, and other key partners, and report back to the PSC. These consultations would clarify what is politically and operationally possible under current conditions. They would also provide a realistic assessment of the parties' willingness to cooperate—a factor that should weigh heavily when the PSC later decides how to ensure accountability for atrocities committed since the outbreak of the war (more on this below). As such, this engagement offers another avenue to exert pressure on the belligerents. The AU, in close coordination with the UN, could also explore how the arrangements envisaged under Security Council Resolution 2719 could support or complement an African-led protection effort.

d) The AU, through the PSC, could further strengthen its response through the establishment of an independent high-level Commission of Inquiry. Such a body could be modeled on the [2013 PSC-mandated Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan](#), which was recommended by the AU Commission and submitted its [report in October 2015](#). Its terms of reference would be clear: to thoroughly investigate violations committed since the start of the war—attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law, and other acts that may constitute atrocity crimes, building on the findings of the Monitoring Mechanism. The Inquiry Commission would also propose accountability options, drawing on the full range of AU instruments, including the [2019 Transitional Justice Policy](#), and in full compliance with the imperative to combat impunity as enshrined in the Constitutive Act.

To reinforce this process, the AU Assembly would signal, in advance, that it is prepared—exceptionally—to grant the 1998 Arusha-based African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights a temporary jurisdiction to try those the proposed Commission of Inquiry may identify as responsible for atrocity crimes. This would, in effect, allow the Arusha Court—on an exceptional basis—to assume the role envisaged for the African Court of Justice and Human Rights under the 2014 Malabo Protocol, even though that court has not yet been operationalised due to insufficient ratifications. There is precedent for such an approach. In February 2010, pending the entry into force of the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the [AU Assembly](#) incorporated into the Union's normative framework on

unconstitutional changes of government two of the Charter's most consequential provisions: the prohibition on perpetrators of unconstitutional changes of government from participating in elections held to restore constitutional order, and the imposition of sanctions against any Member State found to have instigated an unconstitutional change in another.

The expansion of the jurisdiction of the Arusha Court would not predetermine that criminal prosecutions will follow. Rather, it creates a credible deterrent: if the parties continue on their current path, the AU would have a judicial avenue ready. But if they move seriously toward a cessation of hostilities, including an end to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and a political process, the Assembly could instead opt for transitional justice mechanisms—truth-telling, reparations, and reconciliation—rather than immediate criminal justice. Upon receiving the report of the Commission of Inquiry, the PSC would weigh both the evidence and the conduct of the parties—whether they cooperated, including with respect to the possible deployment of a protection-focused mission as outlined above, whether they moved toward a ceasefire and a political settlement—and decide which accountability route to take. In effect, the possibility of African judicial action becomes a Damocles sword aimed at compelling the warring parties to compromise, while leaving space for a more restorative path should they choose peace.

One could argue that the establishment of an AU-led Monitoring Mechanism and a Commission of Inquiry would risk duplicating the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission

created in October 2023 in response to the war. In a narrow, technical sense, that argument has merit. The UN mechanism is already mandated to establish the facts, investigate violations, collect and preserve evidence, and identify perpetrators.

But this line of reasoning overlooks a critical political and institutional dimension: the value of an African-anchored process. An AU-led mechanism would situate accountability for Sudan within Africa's own peace and security architecture. Such an arrangement is more likely to generate sustained follow-up within AU structures, including the PSC, than reliance on UN processes alone. There is also a practical consideration. The Sudanese authorities have thus far denied entry to the UN Fact-Finding Mission. An AU-anchored process, framed within African norms and peer accountability, could offer additional entry points for engagement and cooperation, even if imperfect.

e) The PSC has repeatedly discussed the role of external actors accused of fuelling the war, condemning any interference and warning that those involved will be held accountable, including in its 28 October communiqué. It instructed the Commission to convene a meeting with the UN, IGAD and the Quad to build a coordinated response, and reiterated its call for the PSC Subcommittee on Sanctions, in collaboration with the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), to identify all outside actors backing the belligerents and propose measures within three weeks. That the PSC's request—articulated in its 21 June 2024 communiqué, with a clear three-month timeline for the AU Commission

to submit recommendations, renewed on 4 August 2025 and reiterated on 28 October—had to be restated once more on 16 December points, at the very least, to significant implementation challenges. UN practice shows that investigations of this nature require strong support mechanisms, such as panels of experts. The AU could create its own, but doing so would be costly, technically demanding and slow—and the AU simply lacks the specialised machinery the UN has developed for this purpose.

A more realistic and strategically useful option would be for the PSC, within the framework of article 8(11) of its Protocol—which explicitly authorises informal consultations with, among others, parties interested in a conflict or a situation under its consideration as well as with international organisations—to enhance engagement between its Subcommittee on Sanctions and the UN Panel of Experts, which already investigates these issues under Security Council mandate. These informal consultations would allow the PSC to remain fully informed, avoid duplication, and reinforce AU-UN cooperation. Armed with this information, the PSC could request the Chairperson of the Commission to engage concerned states and entities, conveying the AU's expectations and concerns. The PSC itself, drawing on the above-mentioned article of its Protocol, could hold discrete conversations with the concerned actors and press for alignment with AU's objectives. This approach is lighter, faster, and has the potential to yield tangible results.

f) Beyond all the institutional processes and diplomatic initiatives outlined above, Africa will also be judged by the level of solidarity the continent

demonstrates with the Sudanese people themselves in their hour of need. As noted earlier, more than four million Sudanese have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. These countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan, deserve praise for their generosity. But their capacity is not unlimited; this burden should be shared by all African states. And none of this obviously absolves the wider international community of its responsibilities.

There are simple, meaningful steps other African countries can take: easing visa procedures for Sudanese seeking travel; opening borders to those needing temporary protection; contributing financially or otherwise to the UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) doing heroic work on the ground; allowing Sudanese athletes to participate in national championships, as Mauritania did last year and Rwanda is currently doing for some of the [Sudan's football clubs](#)—gestures that were rightly highlighted in the context of the Sudanese national team's participation at AFCON 2025 in Morocco; and just offering the basic compassion that Sudanese so desperately need. Such measures would go a long way in complementing Sudanese local humanitarian efforts. Sudan has long been one of the African countries most generous toward refugees from across the continent. Today, Africa owes its people something in return: the spirit of solidarity that has animated the pan-African project from the very beginning.

To ensure follow-up, the AU Commission, working closely with the Subcommittee on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), may wish to

significantly step up its engagement with Member States, with a view to catalysing a level of mobilisation commensurate with the gravity of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

This enhanced engagement could take several mutually reinforcing forms. First, it could include regular, formal communications to Member States, including from the Chairperson of the Commission to Heads of State and Government, urging concrete action along the lines outlined above as well as others that may be deemed relevant. This would help keep the situation on national agendas and reinforce collective African responsibility.

Second, the Commission and the PSC could convene, at regular intervals, dedicated open sessions focused specifically on the humanitarian situation in Sudan, in close cooperation with UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), given its central coordinating role, and other relevant UN agencies. Such sessions would allow for authoritative briefings on needs, gaps, and access constraints, while also providing a platform for Member States to announce pledges, facilitation steps or any other practical enablers of response. On its part, the AU Commission could use the information gathered for its own political and diplomatic engagements with Member States, international partners, and humanitarian agencies, while also encouraging African NGOs involved in humanitarian action to step in and providing them with financial support—similar to the assistance the OAU extended to several African NGOs in the mid-1990s.

Third, the AU could undertake high-level field visits to Sudan, where conditions permit, and to refugee-hosting countries and camps in the region. Visits of this type, involving representatives of the Commission, the PRC Subcommittee, and the PSC, would serve several purposes: to anchor policy discussions in the lived realities of affected populations and inform more grounded decision-making, to galvanize political will, and to reinforce solidarity with host countries and affected communities.

g) Should the various steps outlined above be deemed relevant, the Commission and the PSC may wish to articulate them in a clear and, where appropriate, time-bound PSC communiqué to be transmitted to the UN Security Council for information and support. An expression of support by the Council would add political weight to the AU efforts and make it easier to rally the wider international community behind them. There is a precedent. In 2012, after tensions between Sudan and South Sudan escalated, including the Heglig incident, the PSC met on 24 April and adopted a [communiqué](#) that spelled out a full sequence of steps—on security, on oil, on borders—and defined acceptable behaviour for both parties, explicitly grounding it in AU norms. The AU then shared the document with the Security Council and worked its members bilaterally. On 2 May, the Council adopted [resolution 2046 \(2012\)](#), essentially a copy-paste of the PSC text—amplifying AU efforts and reinforcing prospects for compliance. Of course, what worked in 2012 may not work in 2025, particularly given existing geopolitical tensions. But the simple act of trying is the first step toward making it possible.

REAFFIRMING THE AU'S PURPOSE

All the measures suggested above have already been referenced, in one form or another, in existing PSC decisions and AU Commission pronouncements. They also align closely with the AU's key instruments—the Constitutive Act, the PSC Protocol, the various human rights Charters, Protocols and Conventions, and the Common African Defense and Security Policy—as well as with the pledge made at the PSC's launch in May 2004. And they draw inspiration from past AU experiences and lessons learned from them.

The urgency now is to deploy these instruments with greater decisiveness and a singular and sustained focus on follow-up and implementation. In this regard, as the AU pursues and intensifies its efforts, two specific considerations merit particular attention.

First, there is a case for establishing a dedicated and adequately staffed capacity to follow the Sudan file closely, provide sustained support to the implementation of PSC communiqués, and ensure systematic follow-up on initiatives undertaken by the Commission. Useful lessons can be drawn from past experience. During the deployment of AMIS, and in light of the scale and complexity of the challenges involved, the Commission established the Darfur Integrated Task Force (DITF) within the Peace and Security Department. While its core staff consisted of AU-contracted personnel, the DITF also included representatives of partner institutions and countries. It served as a coordination hub at headquarters, overseeing support to AMIS and ensuring coherence across the

AU. The Commission may wish to revisit this experience and assess its relevance to current requirements, with a view to designing an effective backstopping and coordination structure for ongoing African-led efforts on Sudan.

Second, the reports the Commission is required to submit as per the relevant provisions of the PSC Protocol to guide PSC deliberations—and the communiqués issued by both organs—are not only bureaucratic paperwork. They are also potent political tools: they can name and shame, empower actors capable of making a positive difference, encourage or compel action, and shape the behaviour of parties on the ground. For an organization whose strength lies in its normative authority, these instruments are diplomatic weapons of first resort. Indeed, during the height of the Darfur crisis in the early 2000s, the Commission produced more reports than at any other time—a reminder of how heavily we relied on these tools to drive the AU's efforts forward.

While the AU cannot guarantee outcomes—nor could any other entity for that matter—it has a duty to leave no stone unturned to assist the Sudanese people. It has the mandate, the moral authority and the tools required to contribute meaningfully to halting the hostilities, protecting civilians, and setting the stage for a political solution in line with its principles. Africa cannot fail Sudan. The choices made now will define not only the fate of the Sudanese people, but also the credibility and capacity of the AU itself. The continent must rise to this moment—fully, visibly, and resolutely.



MEDIA AND RESEARCH SERVICES

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ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African union.

We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training, strategic communications, technical advisory services, and convening and facilitation.

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