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MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE
SIXTEENTH ORDINARY MEETING
OF THE SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
ON DEFENCE, SAFETY AND SECURITY

5 JUNE 2024
NELSON MANDELA HALL,
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PRESENTATION OF THE STATE OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA
BY DR. ALHAJI SARJOH BAH, DIRECTOR, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE,
POLITICAL AFFAIRS PEACE AND SECURITY DEPARTMENT

- **Your Excellency Hanana Ould Sidi, Minister of Defence of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Chairperson of the 16th Ordinary Meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security,**
- **Members of the Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security,**
- **Ministers of Defence, Safety and Security, and Representatives of Member States,**
- **Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security,**
- **Representatives of Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with a profound sense of responsibility that I stand before you today to address the state of peace and security in Africa. Our continent, rich in diversity and potential, has faced numerous challenges that have tested the resilience and determination of its people. As we navigate through these turbulent times, it is crucial to reflect on our progress and the obstacles that lie ahead.

In the spirit of unity and collective action, let us embark on this journey of reflection and action, reaffirming our commitment to a peaceful and secure Africa.

As we convene to deliberate on the critical challenges our continent faces, we must recognise the complex and persistent security dilemmas that marked the year 2023. The African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) have endured considerable pressure. The Protection of Civilians have encountered notable obstacles amid the rigours of multilateralism.

- **Chairperson, Members of the STCDSS Bureau,**
- **Ministers,**

Across Africa's diverse landscapes, we observe unyielding terrorism, intensifying strife, and growing discord at the borders of AU member states. These concerns are magnified by ecological disputes, stretching from Libya to the Lake Chad Basin, traversing the Sahel, to Somalia and Cabo Delgado. The continued engagement of private military firms presents further complexities to our united defence initiatives.

The phenomenon of Democratic backsliding, characterised by Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG), is deeply concerning. Following the previous AU Summit, military takeovers in Gabon and Niger have occurred, alongside numerous coup attempts, resulting in the suspension of six Member States, (*Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan*) the most significant number in the history of the Union.

Internationally, the fallout from the Russia/Ukraine conflict and the Israeli war in Gaza has intensified instability, impacting our continent detrimentally. These developments highlight the critical necessity for reinvigorated multilateral collaboration.

Yet, in the midst of these challenges, the spirit of democracy continues to thrive within our Member States, evidenced by the successful presidential and legislative elections in 13 AU Member States. Liberia's handover of authority stands as a symbol of optimism and a testament to our collective ideals. The Assembly lauded Former President H.E. George Weah for his commitment to democratic tenets and the peaceful handover of power to President H.E. Joseph Boakai.

I now present an update on the security situation, region by region, reflecting the current dynamics and challenges faced across the continent.

Eastern Africa/Horn of Africa: The situation in the Eastern Africa region remains volatile, characterised by the devastating war in Sudan, the elongated transition in South Sudan, stabilisation and state-building efforts in Somalia supported by the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), progress in the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in Tigray, and transnational organised crime including human trafficking. The humanitarian situation in the region has been exacerbated by severe drought and flooding related to climate change in this environmentally fragile region, with a significant impact on lives and livelihoods across the Horn of Africa in particular.

West Africa/Sahel Region: The situation in the region has been characterised by unconstitutional changes of government in Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and growing insecurity, resulting from the activities of terrorism and violent extremism within the Sahel region. The region has witnessed continuous violent attacks by extremist groups on both security forces and civilians. The humanitarian situation in the region continues to deteriorate as terrorist and armed groups mount pressure and unprecedented attacks on local communities with impunity. The devastating impact of climate change and transnational organised crime continues to serve as a threat multiplier in West Africa.

Central Africa/Great Lakes Region: The Central African region continues to face security and political challenges, particularly in the Central African Republic and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The area is faced with armed groups the presence of armed groups, hostile entities, and mercenaries, notably around the Great Lakes and within the Central African Republic. Additionally, Gabon has experienced an unconstitutional change of government. In eastern DRC, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated due to the M23 and other armed groups. Concerns are mounting over potential further violence, linked to the failure to implement several peace accords and the commencement of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (MONUSCO) withdrawal, alongside the deployment of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission in the DRC, along with the Luanda and Nairobi processes, demonstrate the leaders' commitment to stabilising the situation in the eastern DRC and the broader region.

Southern Africa: Southern Africa remained generally calm except for the situation in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. The region remained seized with the political and security situations in Mozambique through the operations of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), which made significant progress against the Jihadist group in Mozambique.

North Africa: The North Africa region remained generally calm except for the continuing transition in Libya and the impact of natural disasters, floods in the east of the country, and the effects of terrorism in the Sahel. The region also continues to witness the growing activities of transnational organised criminal networks involved in drug, human and weapons trafficking. The deluge of irregular migrants from various parts of Africa created unease and political tensions across the region, including in Tunisia and Libya, relating to the adverse effects of African immigrants crossing over to Europe.

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- **Members of the STCDSS Bureau,**

I will now outline the thematic issues and response tools that are shaping the security landscape across the continent, highlighting the key factors influencing stability and peace in our regions.

- i. Terrorism and Violent Extremism
- ii. Unconstitutional Change of Government
- iii. Climate Change, Peace and Security Nexus
- iv. Children in Conflict Situations
- v. Women, Peace, and Security
- vi. Operationalisation of Africa Standby Force
- vii. Financing for AU Peace and Security Activities
- viii. Continental Early Warning Systems

Focused on knowledge generation, the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department proudly presented to the Assembly two flagship reports highlighting our modest achievements in governance, peace, and security since 2021:

- *Mid-Term Progress Report on Collaborative Actions Towards Peace, Security, and Stability in Africa*
- *The 2022 Annual Report of Elections in Africa: Democracy at Work*

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Outlook for Peace and Security in 2024

As we stand in the middle of 2024, we are reminded of the resilience and tenacity that define our great continent. The outlook for peace and security in Africa is a canvas of challenge and opportunity, painted with the broad strokes of our collective efforts and the fine lines of our individual commitments.

The year ahead holds the promise of progress and the potential for transformation. It is a year where the seeds of peace could take root deeper into the soil of our shared aspirations, and the fruits of security may ripen in the light of our collaborative endeavours.

The AU must act decisively as we approach critical milestones—only six years until the 2030 goal of “Silencing the Guns” in Africa and less than 40 years until the projected realisation of seven aspirations of Agenda 2063. Our commitment remains unwavering, and we recognise the importance of effective support for the Peace and Security Council (PSC). Guided by strategic insights, we project the following key priorities for 2024:

1. **Inclusive Political Transitions:** The AU will actively promote inclusive political transitions on the continent.
 2. **South Sudan:** Our unwavering support for South Sudan continues. We must mobilise resources for the general elections scheduled for December 2024. The C5 (South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Chad, and Rwanda) stands united in this effort.
 3. **Sudan:** We need to intensify efforts to achieve a comprehensive ceasefire and initiate political dialogue in Sudan. The AU High-Level Panel for Sudan, led by H.E. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, is closely collaborating with IGAD and other stakeholders to engage Sudanese parties.
 4. **Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms:** In 2024, we begin implementing the AU’s 10-year strategic plan for human rights protection.
 5. **Ethiopia COHA:** Implementing the Pretoria Peace Agreement for Northern Ethiopia remains crucial. The AU will continue supporting the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process.
 6. **Somalia:** The AU cannot abandon Somalia at this critical juncture. Our focus is on consolidating and safeguarding the gains made by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) post-December 2024.
 7. **Maritime Security:** The AU is advancing plans for the first-ever Continental Maritime exercise, AMANI Africa III.
 8. **Inclusive Education and Emergency Situations:** We prioritise the right to inclusive education, especially in emergency contexts.
 9. **AU-REC Cooperation:** Strengthening collaboration with regional bodies (IGAD, ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, UMA) remains central to addressing peace, security, and governance challenges.
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In conclusion, I will be remiss if I fail to remind this 16th STCDSS session about the Assembly’s unwavering stance against UCGs. To achieve the aspirations of AU Agenda 2063 and ensure future generations’ prosperity, we must firmly reject military dictatorships and uphold the principles of democracy and good governance.

Let us forge ahead with unwavering resolve, bolstered by the lessons of the past and inspired by the vision of a continent at peace with itself. Together, we shall strive not only to anticipate the storms on the horizon but to navigate through them, charting a course towards a horizon where every African can wake to a day free of fear and full of hope.

In unity, there is strength. In action, there is change. In hope, there is a future. May the year 2024 be marked by our united front against adversity and our shared triumphs in the pursuit of peace and security for all.

Let solidarity guide our path toward lasting peace and security.