

# Peace & Security Council Report



AU Summit 2026: security realities amid reform and justice pursuits

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## AU Summit 2026: security realities amid reform and justice pursuits

The 39<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Summit of the African Union (AU) Assembly, held on the 14 and 15 February 2026 in Addis Ababa, produced 39 decisions, 18 declarations and two resolutions. These were across six thematic areas – peace and security, governance, economic integration, institutional reform, health and humanitarian affairs and historical justice.

Following the 2025 theme of reparations, which was elevated to a decade theme, the 39<sup>th</sup> Summit followed the 2026 theme ‘Assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063’. While water and sanitation were addressed numerous times, the summit clearly sought to advance both the reparatory justice agenda from last year and pressing continental security priorities. Beneath the 59 commitments lie a familiar tension: ambitious pronouncements meet persistent implementation gaps, as the AU navigates compounded conflicts, political instability and external pressures.

### Most states present

Attendance at the 39<sup>th</sup> summit reflected moderate political engagement. Based on AU sources and compiled data, 49 of the AU’s 55 member states were represented in some capacity. Forty delegations were headed by a monarch, president, prime minister or vice-president. About 51% of active membership was represented by a president or monarch.

While executive-level participation remained consistent with that of previous summits, presidential attendance declined, suggesting greater delegation to prime ministers or vice-presidents (only in a few countries do prime ministers hold ultimate executive power). This indicates sustained institutional engagement with AU processes but a more limited presence of heads of state at the AU Assembly. The higher presidential turnout at the 2025 summit is probably linked to AU Commission leadership elections.

### Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>AfCFTA</b>	African Continental Free Trade Area	<b>PSC</b>	Peace and Security Council
<b>AMA</b>	African Medicines Agency	<b>PSOs</b>	Peace support operations
<b>ASF</b>	Africa Standby Force	<b>RECs</b>	Regional economic communities
<b>AU</b>	African Union	<b>RMs</b>	Regional mechanisms
<b>AUC</b>	AU Commission	<b>SADR</b>	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
<b>CAADP</b>	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme	<b>SAMIM</b>	Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States	<b>UNSC</b>	UN Security Council
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of understanding		

Chart 1: Representation in 2024, 2025 and 2026 summits

Level of representation	37 <sup>th</sup> AU summit (2024)	38 <sup>th</sup> AU summit (2025)	39 <sup>th</sup> AU summit (2026)
Presidents	24	29	24
Monarchs (sovereign king/queen)	2	1	1
<b>Heads of state subtotal</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>
Prime ministers	6	4	11
Vice-presidents	7	3	5
<b>Total executive-level delegations</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>39<sup>th</sup> AU summit (2026): level of representation</b>			<b>Number</b>
Monarchs (sovereign king/queen)			1
Presidents			24
Prime ministers			11
Vice-presidents			5
<b>Executive-level sub total</b>			<b>40</b>
Foreign ministers			5
Chargé d'affaires			1 (Eritrea)
<b>Ministerial/diplomatic subtotal</b>			<b>6</b>
<b>Total member states present</b>			<b>49</b>

As with the 38<sup>th</sup> summit, six countries remain suspended and unrepresented, although the composition of the six was different. Two countries had their suspension lifted – Gabon and Guinea-Conakry – and two countries replaced them for unconstitutional changes of government – Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau. President Brice Oligi Nguema of Gabon and President Mamady Doumbouya of Guinea-Conakry made their debuts as presidents following post-coup transitions. Several other countries were represented at ministerial or diplomatic level.

Despite fewer presidents, the 40 executive-level delegations indicate that member states remain attentive to continental developments, particularly as the summit addressed ongoing conflicts, governance challenges and institutional reform.

### Leadership and institutional continuity

The summit elected President Évariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi chairperson of the AU Assembly for 2026, succeeding Angola’s João Lourenço, a move from southern to central Africa representation. Ghana’s John Dramani Mahama assumed the first vice-chairperson position, with Tanzania’s Samia Suluhu Hassan second vice-chairperson. The third vice-chairperson seat

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### Current PSC Chairperson

**H.E Almon Mahlaba Mamba**,  
Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Eswatini to the AU and PSC Chairperson for March 2026

### PSC members

Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda

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– from the northern region – is yet to be confirmed. Completing the bureau composition for 2026 is the outgoing chair – Angola – as rapporteur. Unlike in previous years, regional disputes did not affect the bureau formation, allowing continuity and institutional memory at the AU highest level.

The 39<sup>th</sup> summit was also the one-year mark since Mahmoud Ali Youssouf assumed office as AU Commission chair. In his first year, he emphasised peace and security as the foundation for development, including strengthening conflict prevention tools and advancing operational readiness of the Africa Standby Force (ASF). His agenda also prioritises sustainable financing, promoting economic integration through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, bolstering coordination with regional economic communities and advancing youth empowerment and digital transformation initiatives.

### Peace and security agenda

Security dominated the 39<sup>th</sup> summit agenda, reflecting the AU’s pressing operational realities. Sudan remained the most urgent concern, with ongoing hostilities despite repeated calls for ceasefires, unhindered humanitarian access, and inclusive Sudanese-led process. The Peace and Security Council (PSC), chaired by Egypt, convened ministerial-level discussions on Sudan and Somalia, while eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) drew attention through Togolese-led mediation coordination. The summit largely reaffirmed prior positions rather than introducing new mechanisms, highlighting the persistent gap between declaratory commitments and actionable intervention.

Resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government in 2025, with ongoing terrorism in the Sahel, Horn of Africa and Lake Chad Basin, reinforced the AU’s zero-tolerance stance and the need for coordinated, multilayered responses.

Most of the proposed initiatives of Kenya’s President William Ruto – champion for institutional reforms – were adopted. Reforms and strengthening peace and security include a harmonised African governance and peace and security architectures (APSA) implementation plan team and enhanced PSC coordination with the Committee of Ten and African UN Security Council members (known as the A3). It also encompasses an AU early action

guideline and the functionalisation of the African Court of Justice. Ruto’s proposal to increase the AU Peace Fund endowment from US\$400 million to US\$1 billion was noted but not actioned, signalling a lack of consensus at the moment.

### Forty summit delegations were headed by a monarch, president, prime minister or vice-president

The summit also decided to hold an extraordinary meeting in Luanda, Angola under the theme ‘Strengthening mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution in Africa’ to advance continental preventive diplomacy and crisis response. A landmark achievement was the adoption of the memorandum of understanding on the ASF, formalising rapid deployment and operational coordination with regional communities.

Chart 2: PSC members (2026 to 2028)

Region	PSC members
Central	DRC, Gabon
Eastern	Somalia, Uganda
Northern	Morocco
Southern	Lesotho, South Africa
Western	Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone

Historical elections to the PSC also marked progress, with six new members from the 10 seats up for election and Somalia securing membership for the first time, reflecting frontline representation in continental decision-making.

Perhaps the most notable departure from draft Assembly decisions to final decisions was the final decisions’ omission of the request for the AU Commission, through the AU Office of the Legal Counsel, to prepare draft administrative guidelines for the implementation of the criteria in Article 5 of the PSC Protocol and Article 16 governing relations with RECs, with a report to be submitted at the 2027 summit. This sharply indicates the commitment deficiencies for implementation of agreed upon criteria in Article 5(2).

In fact this omission stalls progress towards fulfilling Article 5(4) that stipulates a periodic review by the Assembly on whether PSC members continue to meet the requirements to be a PSC member.

## **Territorial integrity**

Territorial integrity remains a central principle as per Article 3(b) of the AU Constitutive Act, yet the continent in 2025 faced complex international dynamics. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2797, adopted in October 2025, endorsed Morocco's 2007 autonomy proposal for Western Sahara. While the UN has formally addressed this, the AU continues to recognise the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic as a member despite only 18 AU member states (roughly 32%) currently maintaining active recognition of SADR.

Israel's recognition of Somaliland prompted AU condemnation and summit leaders reiterated that no external actor would unilaterally alter the territorial configuration of a member state. The AU's relative silence on 2797 highlights the limits on continental engagement, where greater international consensus exists while continental support remains mixed as AU member state recognition for the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic has gradually declined.

At the same time, the AU is strengthening Africa's strategic positioning in global diplomacy. Institutional reforms have included the creation of a dedicated G20 unit to advance the continent's collective engagement in international fora. This is alongside a mandate for a five-member expert panel to draft a harmonised African foreign policy framework. Yet foreign policy remains a conceptual prerogative of sovereign states rather than the responsibility of multilateral or intergovernmental organisations.

Therefore, the AU's intergovernmental structure does not seamlessly provide a conceptual or operational environment for a fully cohesive foreign policy – a challenge the five-person panel will have to navigate. Even advanced regional organisations such as the European Union stop short of defining a single foreign policy, highlighting the structural hurdles and sovereign sensitivities the AU faces in aligning member state priorities while asserting Africa's collective interest globally.

## **Africa and the global economy**

The summit addressed Africa's role in the global economic system while advancing a broader agenda on historical justice. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was reaffirmed as a flagship Agenda 2063 programme, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) digital identity and traceability systems were launched and the African Medicines Agency (AMA) became fully operational. The declaration also supported climate action, water investment, biodiversity protections and infrastructure financing, reflecting the AU's water sustainability theme to strengthen the continent's economic integration.

## **Security dominated the summit agenda amid Sudan and eastern DRC conflicts, coups and terrorism**

Historical justice and reparation also featured prominently at this Summit. Decisions recognised slavery, deportation and colonisation as crimes against humanity, endorsing the Algiers Declaration (2025). This primarily Ghana-led campaign has also resulted in the UN General Assembly Resolution A/80/L.48 on March 25 2026 declaring trafficking of enslaved Africans and racialised chattel enslavement of Africans as the gravest crime against humanity. They led to mechanisms including the AU Committee of Experts on Reparations and planning for the proposed Pan-African committee on memory and historical truth. While largely medium term, these initiatives signal efforts to integrate economic diplomacy and historical justice efforts into Africa's contemporary engagement, even though their impact will depend on sustained implementation.

## **Ambitious declarations, persistent gaps**

Security dominated the summit agenda amid Sudan and eastern DRC conflicts, coups and terrorism. Despite the abovementioned reforms, implementation gaps remain, due not least to member states' willingness and interests, continued inconsistency in AU-regional community coordination, financing and external pressures. On the other hand, territorial integrity debates reveal tensions among states, AU principles and external pressures, a perennial crisis that continues to test AU effectiveness.

# Repositioning the AU PSC: capacity gaps to meaningful influence

During the AU summit in February 2026, 10 states were elected to the PSC for a two-year term from April 2026 to March 2028. Benin, Gabon, Lesotho, Morocco, Somalia and South Africa were elected into the 15-member PSC, while Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Sierra Leone and Uganda were re-elected. The five existing members with three-year terms are Ethiopia, Nigeria, Algeria, Cameroon and Eswatini.

The mandates of both two-year and three-year term members will end on 31 March 2028, the second time when all terms will end at the same time, after the first occurrence in 2010. Except for Somalia, all those elected have been PSC members before. The rotating memberships often present the AU with renewed opportunities to tackle crises through a relatively new lens. The stakes are high for the new PSC configuration, as African citizens demand African agency amid multiple instabilities and security challenges.

Although the PSC is the AU's key decision-making organ for conflict prevention, management and resolution, external actors are influential in the continent's conflict landscape, raising doubts about commitments to African solutions. The United States and Middle Eastern countries are currently leading decisive peace efforts in the DRC and Sudan, while Russia is stamping its claim in West Africa's Sahel countries and the Central African Republic.

## Stakes are high for the new PSC configuration, as citizens demand African agency amid instability

The recently established Board of Peace further undermines the crisis-management relevance of multilateral mechanisms such as the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the PSC. Questions persist about the PSC's ability to decisively influence conflict trajectories and maintain normative authority in future. With the current constraints, can the PSC deliver more creatively, leveraging both its strengths and weaknesses?

**Chart 3: New AU PSC member states serving two- and three-year terms from April 2026**



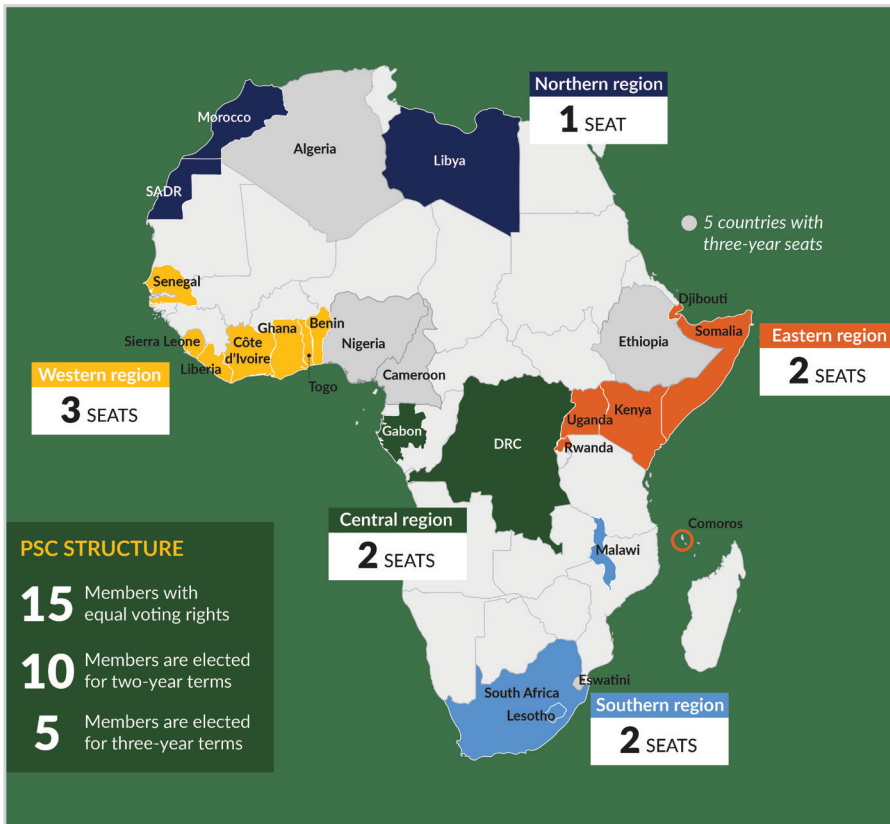
Source: ISS

## Face-off averted

Elections to the PSC have become increasingly competitive over the years, especially when rival countries vie for a seat. The dynamics leading to Morocco's election was tense, because Morocco, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and Libya vied for one seat. Observers were concerned about the re-emergence of contestation between the Morocco and SADR camps, even though Morocco has garnered significant African support since it rejoined the AU in 2017.

But a few days before the AU summit, SADR voluntarily withdrew from the elections, opting to back Libya, which hasn't occupied the PSC role since March 2012. Libya's internal crises and divided government precluded it from serving effectively, resulting in a mere 12 votes compared to Morocco's 32. Libya ceded its membership to Morocco for the April 2022 to March 2025 tenure.

Chart 4: AU PSC elections – countries by region bidding for 10 two-year seats in February 2026



Source: ISS

SADR’s move to withdraw seems strategic, because even if elected to the PSC, it cannot raise the Western Sahara debate. In July 2018, the AU decided via Assembly/AU/Dec.693(XXXI) that it would fully support UN mediation and that the Western Sahara debate would be raised only by the AU troika, namely its outgoing, current and incoming chairpersons, and the chairperson of the AU Commission.

Reports on the UN process can be reported only at AU Assembly level and at the sparse PSC heads of state meetings. Since 2018, the Western Sahara debate hasn’t been discussed at the PSC, nor has there been any AU report on it.

**Strength in weakness?**

Somalia and the DRC are in conflict and are both serving two-year UNSC and PSC terms. Their experience in conflicts qualifies them to push for localised solutions to crises and the imperative of civilian protection in their countries and others affected by conflicts.

Somalia’s first membership of the PSC coincides with its second stint as a non-permanent member of the UNSC since 1972. Somalia could seek to align PSC and UNSC resolutions to ensure sustainable peace and decisive action against al-Shabaab.



THE RECENTLY ESTABLISHED BOARD OF PEACE UNDERMINES THE CRISIS-MANAGEMENT RELEVANCE OF MULTILATERAL MECHANISMS

Somalia, DRC and Liberia, are the three African non-permanent representatives of UNSC. This A3 has since expanded into A3+, with Caribbean representation. Although A3+ members face capacity constraints, their alignment with the PSC offers an opportunity to strengthen African and Caribbean interests at the UNSC. Yet, this requires the PSC to become proactive in crisis response, leading narratives and perspectives on conflict prevention and management, thereby setting the pace for external involvement.

### Normative integrity for norm-breakers?

Article 25(4) of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance prohibits juntas from running for democratic elections. Yet, Gabon's junta stood for and won elections in April 2025 following the ousting of former president Ali Bongo. The PSC immediately lifted the suspension on the country. Similarly, Guinea's suspension was lifted in January 2026 following the 28 December 2025 elections after the junta won. Gabon is not a party to the charter but Guinea is, which highlights the AU's desperation to whitewash unconstitutional changes of government despite its principles.

### The AU seem desperate to whitewash unconstitutional changes of government despite its principles

Gabon was elected to the PSC during the AU summit in February 2026, a seeming violation of Article 5(2g) of the PSC protocol, which requires PSC members to be elected in 'respect for constitutional governance, in accordance with the Lomé Declaration as well as the rule of law and human rights'.

Successive PSC retreats have repeatedly emphasised the need to apply the criteria strictly. But many African states lack a track record of good governance and rule of law.

The worst and unacknowledged unconstitutional government changes are orchestrated by authoritarian democracies via lawfare and electoral and constitutional manipulations. Data from the 2025 Freedom House report also show that political rights and civil liberties have deteriorated in nearly half of African countries.

Chart 5: Freedom scores of PSC member states

Country	Freedom score: 0 to 100	Rating
South Africa	81	Free
Lesotho	66	Free
Benin	60	Partly free
Sierra Leone	59	Partly free
Côte d'Ivoire	49	Partly free
Nigeria	44	Partly free
Morocco	37	Partly free
Uganda	34	Not free
Algeria	31	Not free
Gabon	21	Not free
DRC	18	Not free
Ethiopia	18	Not free
Eswatini	17	Not free
Cameroon	15	Not free
Somalia	8	Not free

Source: *Freedom in the World 2025*

The 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance shows that nearly 50% of Africa's population faced worsening security and rule of law over the last decade.

Continental dynamics reflect those within the PSC, with more than half of current members considered not free. UNSC members also fall short in rule of law and democratic standards, but its membership criteria are less stringent than those of the PSC. The latter were developed to foster democratic and human rights standards, which militate against the legitimacy and credibility of governments in Africa and, by extension, the AU.

Although PSC decisions are guided by the AU Constitutive Act and protocols, the major concern is the capacity of PSC members to uphold the AU's normative integrity in all circumstances, especially when rule of law and democratic norms are violated.

## Rethinking PSC influences

In their first decade, the AU and PSC exerted relative influence over conflict parties and juntas. To some extent, member states respected AU principles given the quest for African solutions and backing from influential countries in and outside the continent.

But the AU's declining influence and the rebound in external sway in contemporary African conflicts show that African states are focusing more on national interests and pragmatic measures. In conflicts, therefore, parties with greater monetary and military influence and effective sanction mechanisms are more likely to bring warring parties to the table. Hence the effectiveness of the new PSC configuration lies in its ability to rethink its sources of influence, including conflict parties.

One aspect of this is to exploit both internal and external coercive measures to persuade warring parties to negotiate an end to conflict. It could offer neutral mediation, capitalising on warring parties' agitation over external sanctions to urge these parties to seek consensual, principle-driven solutions rather than forced outcomes imposed by external parties.

Effectiveness of the new PSC configuration lies in its ability to rethink its sources of influence, including on conflict parties

In early March 2026, for instance, the United States imposed sanctions on Rwanda's military over its backing of the M23 rebellion in DRC, a continued violation of the Washington peace deal between Rwanda and DRC. The AU must engage warring stakeholders to seek mediated solutions as a pathway to lifting sanctions.

Internally, the AU must revisit its reluctance to impose sanctions. Despite reviving its sanctions committee in 2024 – 15 years after it was created – the PSC has imposed its customary suspensions only on perpetrators of military coups, but not on spoilers of peace.

PSC threats of sanctions against spoilers of peace in Sudan and the DRC, through its sanctions committee, would be realised if the sanctions are backed and implemented by AU member states and regional economic communities.

For the PSC to be effective, African states, especially influential ones, must support its decisions, including sanctions, regardless of their perspectives of and relationships with affected parties. The PSC should hold regular meetings and conduct joint activities with communities to ensure harmony and buy-in for continental and regional decisions.



THE AU MUST ENGAGE  
WARRING STAKEHOLDERS  
TO SEEK MEDIATED  
SOLUTIONS AS A PATHWAY  
TO LIFTING SANCTIONS

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## Will the new African Union chair thrive?

During the AU Summit, on 15 and 16 February 2026, Burundi assumed the AU rotating chairship. Given the regional rotation principle under Article 6(4) of the AU Constitutive Act, Burundi represents Central Africa.

While the country is poised to fulfil its continental duties, some observers question its ability to do so. Some argue that Burundi, with a territory of 27 834 km<sup>2</sup> and a nominal gross domestic product of US\$3.6 billion, has limited capacity to drive AU affairs effectively. This is especially so as doubts are cast on the body's ability to address Africa's challenges amid a severe crisis in continental and global multilateralism.

Others maintain that managing continental affairs has never been a matter of size or financial capability, but of member states collectively driving their organisation. Hence, the chair's ability to garner support from peers and project diplomatic capacity are also factors.

The debate over small versus big state chairs is not new. It arose in 2023, when Comoros took the seat, prompting an Institute of Security Studies analysis that concluded that size and economic capacity are not the sole criteria for determining effective AU leadership.

### Is Burundi set for success?

Several elements debunk the perception that Burundi has limited capacity to chair the AU. A brief benchmark with Comoros, provides clarity. Despite having half of Burundi's gross domestic product and 12 times less territory, Comoros beat the odds as AU chair, driving continental affairs with tangible gains. Among others, it put burning issues such as the blue economy in the spotlight, steering crisis response in the Great Lakes region and finalising the AU's admission to the G20.

Moreover, unlike Comoros, which had seven priorities, Burundi has three – peace and security, the theme of the year and youth, women and innovation. This indicates much greater focus and optimal use of resources, in line with the AU Assembly's longstanding demand that the assembly bureau and the AU Commission (AUC) chairs narrow their focuses.

Similarly, Burundi brings more experience. First, it has demonstrated resolve in promoting youth affairs both

nationally and continentally. As a signatory to the AU Youth Charter, it has not only incorporated the framework's principles into its national policies but implemented them. It has also supported youth involvement in continental governance, peace and security.

In addition to its well-established role as a troop contributor to AU peace support operations, the country has been the AU special envoy for the Sahel since July 2025 and a focal country in the Great Lakes' crisis response, hosting the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region. In addition, it benefits from a fully composed troika, with the past chair, Angola, and the incoming chair, Ghana, serving as bureau rapporteur and vice-chair, respectively.

The new chair is focusing on peace and security, the year's theme and youth, women and innovation

This was not the case for Comoros in 2023, which dealt with a limping troika without a first vice-chair due to lack of consensus among northern African countries. The disagreement ultimately affected Mauritania's chairship in 2024, resulting in one of the most unprepared and quietest chairships. With its credentials and priorities, Burundi could well thrive.

### Areas to watch

The new chair took over in a global context of shrinking resources and growing continental portfolio, as the AU struggles with internal challenges and strives to position itself as a reliable actor in multilateral spaces. The AU chair must, therefore, display adaptability to change and be a broker among member states, the AUC and regional economic communities and mechanisms to ensure unified, consensus-based responses to Africa's internal and global challenges.

Fewer priorities could be conducive to a successful tenure, but the chair's focuses remain vast and diverse. Challenges in the peace and security domain alone include open conflicts, complex post-coup transitions and counter-terrorism. The theme of the year is also complex, as it includes accelerating the implementation

of member states' commitments and advocating, mobilising and coordinating within AU organs and between the AU and regional communities and mechanisms on water issues. Women, youth and innovation are also multisectoral areas that demand resources and capacity. Without a streamlined workplan with clear success indicators and well-defined sub-areas, achieving tangible results over 12 months will be a test.

## Burundi should demonstrate its ability to drive consensus among member states on sensitive issues

The last two areas demand resource mobilisation to support the tenure and strengthen coordination with the AUC chair. Despite the rotating chairship garnering interest among member states and the growing responsibilities of the incumbent, the AU has yet to allocate resources. Therefore, chairs have to gather their own resources to enhance delivery capacity. For example, Comoros budgeted US\$11 million and had to solicit partners.

In addition, in the absence of coordinated management of continental affairs, the risks of disconnection and friction could be heightened to the point of diverting both bureau and AUC chairs' attention from priorities. Limited consultations with African states through traditional procedures, like the controversial case of Macky Sall's bid for the UN top position, could further undermine the role of the chairperson. Some good practices could be drawn from interactions between Senegal and the former AUC leadership.

### Way forward

To ensure an effective tenure, Burundi should demonstrate its ability to drive consensus among member states on sensitive issues that have exposed fragmentation within AU organs, such as the AU Assembly and the Peace and Security Council. Chief among them have been responses to unconstitutional changes of government and divergences over the AU's role in member-state governance. Burundi could, in its remaining 10 months of leadership, reignite the consensus that once spawned effective AU response to crises. This could be done through open and frank dialogue. It could also explore alternative decision-making tools, including voting across AU organs.

Sound resources are needed for a smooth, successful tenure. Therefore, Burundi could explore innovative fundraising options, such as ad hoc contributions from bureau members, given that steering the AU is a collective endeavour, or resorting to interested partners, as Comoros did. Beyond the short term, Burundi could set a precedent by advocating a dedicated AU budget line to sustain the bureau's operations.

Consistent coordination with the AUC chair is needed to ensure unified management of AU affairs. The Assembly chair could achieve this through regular meetings between the bureau and the AUC chair's office and by establishing information-sharing channels.



BURUNDI HAS A WELL-ESTABLISHED ROLE AS A TROOP CONTRIBUTOR TO AU PEACE OPERATIONS

## Can a new agreement fix the African Standby Force coordination gap?

The 39<sup>th</sup> AU summit took place amid rising continental insecurity, intensifying global power competition and geopolitical uncertainty. The gathering led to the adoption of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the AU and the regional economic communities and regional mechanisms (RECs/RMs), which has been in the making since 2018.

Centred on the ASF – the AU's Africa Peace and Security Architecture pillar for peace support operations (PSOs) – the adoption (the MoU) offered an opportunity to use the mechanism effectively.

### The memorandum adapts to political realities by introducing a more structured mandate framework

The MoU is an integral part of the ongoing process of resetting peace and security frameworks to align with current and emerging threats and issues. In particular, it links with the recently concluded ASF strategic review, which followed the PSC's 2022 call for the reconceptualisation of the force and broader AU institutional reforms.

While the MoU is yet to be signed and ratified by the RECs/RMs, its endorsement by the AU Assembly is a milestone, as the process has spanned many years. Importantly, it indicates measured progress with the potential to address some major constraints of the ASF. It provides greater clarity on the roles of mandate and force generation, the latter involving the acquisition of personnel and equipment, and the training required for the mission. The MoU seeks to further institutionalise practices that previously took place informally.

### The current ASF

The AU's Specialised Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security formally declared in 2016 that the ASF has reached full operational readiness. Yet the force remains underused in addressing the

continent's ongoing crises, as it neither generated forces nor deployed operations as envisaged in its original/foundational concept.

However, the force has contributed to developing strategic capacities for deploying some PSOs. Some RECs/RMs have also leveraged the ASF to deploy missions, notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission in The Gambia and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). Yet these were carried out without prior AU mandate, a procedure enshrined in the ASF policy framework (articles 2.9 and 3.24.b).

Effective ASF use remains hampered by limited political strategic convergence and institutional coordination between the AU and RECs/RMs, among other challenges. These constraints are mutually reinforcing: the absence of harmonised mandating and authorisation processes delays deployment, with gaps in financing and command-and-control fragment implementation undermining long-term operational sustainability.

### Mandate clarity

Lack of clarity in political decision-making is a key constraint for ASF operations. The inaugural Lessons Learned Forum for AU PSOs and ASF highlighted the need for harmonisation in the mandates and authorisations between the PSC and the UN Security Council, and between the REC/RM policy organs. The Forum was established in 2022 to evaluate 20 years of PSOs to reconceptualise and ensure full use of the ASF.

The PSC is the AU's central decision-making body for conflict prevention, management and resolution across the continent. While Article 13 of its protocol gives the Council exclusive authority and responsibility for authorising PSO missions, in practice, RECs/RMs have deployed several missions, largely in response to security crises.

The most recent example was the SAMIM deployment, mandated by the AU and recognised as an ASF

deployment six months after deployment. This reaffirms the need for early consultation and joint analysis to enable political and strategic convergence to achieve common objectives.

The MoU adapts to current political realities by introducing a more structured, yet nimble, mandate framework. The current arrangement clarifies that both the PSC and RECs/RMs can issue mandates for their respective operations. In the case of REC/RMs authorisation, the memorandum stipulates that RECs/RMs undertake 'early consultations with the AU' for missions (Article 6).

## The perennial gap between policy and implementation that plagues AU policies must be overcome

This precludes cases in which RECs/RMs approach the AU for post-facto or delayed endorsement of their deployment as ASF missions, but it creates greater clarity, reaffirming the PSC's or RECs/RMs' mandates to act decisively while considering subsidiarity.

However, early consultation risks being perceived as an optional courtesy rather than a binding requirement for RECs/RMs, which may still see value in deploying missions independently. Interpretation of this provision should follow clear procedures that acknowledge the urgency of processes during crises, where the need for speed can outweigh coordination with the AU.

### **Bridging the coordination divide**

The lack of clear role clarification and subsequent coordination challenges have also hindered ASF progress from mission authorisation to mandate implementation. Apart from challenges for the former, the previous practice was also characterised by limited alignment and interaction between the PSC and RECs/RMs, notably in force generation and command and control. The failure of the AU and ECOWAS to align their responses to the 2012 Mali crisis, which almost led to parallel deployments by the two organisations, exemplifies this challenge.

A longstanding issue before the MoU was that the provision for RECs/RMs to handle force and capability generation, on behalf of the AU, was not effectively enforced. Article 9 of the MoU states that member states, through the RECs/RMs, must make available the pledged capabilities to the AU for deployment.

It stipulates that the generation of pledged capabilities must be conducted through a coordinated and consultative process between the AU and the RECs/RMs. It further requires each regional body to conclude legal agreements with its member states for preparation, employment and post-employment of pledged capabilities. The regional bodies are also to provide quarterly updates to the AU on the status of these, enhancing accountability and institutionalising subsidiarity in force generation.

The MoU further outlines that REC/RMs must ensure that member states fulfil their duty to facilitate training and readiness of uniformed personnel. It also stresses the AU's role in reinforcing standardisation through ASF training policies and harmonised regional training frameworks (Articles 17: 13 to 17 of the memorandum).

The memorandum addresses coordination through designated focal points – units appointed by each party to coordinate and oversee cooperation between the AU and REC/RMs, with the PSO division being the focal AU point. The use of focal points was mentioned in the ASF Policy Framework (paragraphs 2.22 to 2.26), but it has not yet been implemented, which could pose a hurdle to realising the memorandum's provisions.

### **Prospects and recommendations**

The MoU must overcome at least three implementation challenges: political prioritisation, timely REC/RM signatures and the perennial gap between policy and implementation that plagues AU policies. The PSC should make the ASF a priority this year, ensuring the MoU is implemented. It should also urge RECs/RMs to sign the agreement promptly. Finally, it should instruct and liaise with the AU Commission to develop a work plan and relevant operational documents to ensure implementation.

## Egypt's PSC legacy: the case for African institutional resilience

**In this statement, Dr Obaida Eldandarawy, Ambassador of Egypt to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the AU, shares his thoughts on his country's contribution as chair of the PSC.**

As Egypt concluded its two-year membership of the AU PSC in March 2026, one challenge was prominent: the need to preserve and strengthen the African nation-state. This is in an environment in which African countries continue to grapple with pressing peace and security issues.

Despite many borders having had colonial origins, the African nation-state remains the essential building block of the AU and its vessel of sovereignty and the guarantor of territorial integrity. It is the most viable framework through which development, reconstruction, stability, personal dignity and safety and security are delivered to African citizens.

Yet across our continent, worsening peace and security challenges continue to erode the foundations of statehood. Many of these issues come with heavy exploitative external involvement often linked to narrow economic or resources-related interests and global geopolitical dynamics and ambitions. This could see a strong and stable nation-state as a bulwark to such ambitions. The continent finds itself in an axis of alliance with often destructive policies and practices contrary to a stable, developed and secure Africa that is in command of its wealth and meets the needs of its people. This is in no way a criticism of development-centric cooperation with genuine international partners that seek mutually beneficial outcomes.

Egypt's programme of work during its PSC chairship in February 2026, and similarly in October 2024, highlighted the urgency of defending the African nation-state by emphasising how impactful and crosscutting the matter truly is.

In October 2024, the Council visited Port Sudan for the first time since the Sudanese crisis erupted, consulting with the League of Arab States in Cairo and convening a session on the nexus of peace, security and development. It also inaugurated the AU Centre for

Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development and held annual consultations between the PSC and the UN Security Council in New York. It considered the AU Commission report on combatting terrorism, held a session on women, peace and security, examined the connection of climate, peace and security, and received an International Committee of the Red Cross briefing on Africa's humanitarian situation.

### Somalia rejected Israel's recognition of Somaliland as an infringement on its territorial integrity

In February 2026, the Council reviewed the annual report on the state of peace and security in Africa and presented it to the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the AU heads of states and governments (14 to 15 February). It held ministerial-level sessions on Sudan and Somalia, convened an open debate on climate, peace and security and inaugurated the PSC Subcommittee on Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development.

In addition, it examined the governance implications of artificial intelligence and engaged informally with member states undergoing political transitions. The nexus between food security and peace was scrutinised through consultations with Rome-based agencies – the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

These were not disconnected nor disjointed agenda items. They converged around a single theme that is a bedrock of Egyptian foreign policy. This is the necessity of safeguarding the integrity and resilience of African states in the face of mounting multidirectional internal and external pressures.



*Dr Obaida Eldandarawy (left) and the Chairperson of the AUC, H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf*

Across several regions of Africa, non-state armed actors continue to feed on institutional weakness, economic fragility and social division. Their subversive operations erode the monopoly of legitimate force, undermine public trust and fragment national cohesion, leading to instability, misgovernance and even unconstitutional changes of government.

They slowly, but surely, tear the fabric of the nation and provide ample space for exploitative interferences in continental affairs that fuel instability and threaten to unravel decades of painstaking post-independence state consolidation. In so doing, they reverse the long and arduous path of African independence that was set in motion by the likes of Nasser, Nkrumah and Nyerere among other great African leaders and fathers of nations.

Climate stress adds another dangerous layer. The continent is experiencing intensified droughts, floods and extreme weather events that compromise agricultural productivity and exacerbate displacement. Food and water insecurities, in particular, are great concerns. Competition over scarce water resources, transboundary river systems and degraded land increasingly intersect with fragile governance environments, heightening the risk of local and cross-border tensions. Addressing climate resilience must, therefore, include responsible water management, equitable transboundary cooperation and strengthened institutional frameworks for sustainable resource governance.

Rising global food and energy prices – exacerbated by geopolitical shocks – strain household resilience

and public finances. It is clear that when states struggle to deliver basic services, non-state actors exploit the vacuum.

As the PSC grappled with these challenges, one recommendation dominated – Africa must speak clearly and with one voice. It must express vehemently that its sovereignty is not negotiable, its territorial integrity not transactional and its institutions not arenas for external competition and greed.

Nelson Mandela once reminded us that ‘freedom is not merely the casting off of chains, but living in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others’. In today’s context, that freedom includes the sovereign right of African peoples to determine their own political destiny without external manipulation. It recognises and understands that the defence of our institutions is the unfinished episode of our independence struggle. The first chapter of Africa’s liberation was territorial independence. The chapter now unfolding is one of institutional resilience – protecting our states from fragmentation, safeguarding our sovereignty from covert erosion and ensuring that external engagement strengthens rather than subverts our unity.

### *In defending the state and its hard-earned institutions, we defend Africa’s future*

As Egypt concluded its tenure on the PSC, it reaffirmed its commitment to an Africa that is sovereign, united and resilient. The preservation of the African nation state is not merely a necessary defensive posture. It is a forward-looking investment in stability, development and dignity. In defending the state and its hard-earned institutions, we defend Africa’s future. In preserving our nations, we preserve and uphold the union and the interests of our African brothers and sisters. Egypt is ready to further such aims and looks forward to the support of AU member states to rejoin the PSC in 2028.

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*\* This statement was developed with contributions from Mohamed Borhan and Haidy Ahmed, diplomats at the embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Addis Ababa and its permanent mission to the AU*

## About the PSC Report

The *Peace and Security Council Report* analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC's work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

## About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. Our goal is to enhance human security as a means to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible analysis, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

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