

Peace & Security Council Report



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Could African Union presence be a step to peace for Sudan?

In its 1 330th communiqué, the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) reiterated the urgent need to reopen the AU liaison office to Sudan. These offices focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, regional integration and continental advocacy. The key objective is to provide on-the-ground technical support and maintain open communication channels between the host state and the AU Commission to manage peace and security.

The Sudan liaison office was closed in April 2023, when the civil war broke out. The AU, with many international and regional organisations, withdrew its staff and pulled diplomatic missions as heavy fighting erupted in the capital Khartoum. Personnel were relocated to Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the AU, as the organisation initiated virtual shuttle diplomacy with the warring parties to expedite a ceasefire agreement.

Three years into the conflict, the PSC is reinstating its Khartoum office. However, considerations include practical and logistical challenges, evaluation of benefits and possible pitfalls and the office's contribution to AU peacemaking efforts. Could this move cement AU peacemaking efforts and bring a lasting end to hostilities?

Tracing the history

The AU has a longstanding history of mediating and managing conflicts in Sudan. The liaison office was established to advance the comprehensive peace agreement in 2005. Following South Sudan's secession and the simultaneous eruption of the Darfur conflict, the office's mandate was

Acronyms and abbreviations

AES	Alliance of Sahel States	EU	European Union
AMISOM	AU Mission in Somalia	MARWOPNET	Mano River Women's Peace Network
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture	MRU	Mano River Union
ASF	African Standby Force	PSC	Peace and Security Council
ATMIS	AU Transition Mission in Somalia	PSOs	Peace support operations
AU	African Union	REC	Regional economic community
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central Africa States	StG	Silencing the Guns
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States	UCG	Unconstitutional change of government
		UN	United Nations
		WPS	Women, peace and security

extended following the PSC's decision to establish the AU High-level Panel on Darfur and later the AU High-level Implementation Panel. The office was crucial in transmitting PSC decisions to local authorities for implementation and for keeping the PSC and AU Commission informed of and engaged in political dynamics.

The office managed Sudan's multiple conflict hotspots and, in particular, the precarious transition following the military coups in 2019 and 2021. It was led by the AU Commission chairperson's special representative to Sudan, Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche, appointed in March 2019. After the April 2019 military coup, it facilitated meetings of transitional authorities, the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department commissioner and political and civil society groups. These meetings culminated in the power-sharing agreement of August 2019. The office also advised the PSC to suspend Sudan following both military takeovers.

The AU needs to summon political backing from all fronts to ensure that warring parties draw red lines on attacks on the office

Even after the start of the current war, the office continued to respond to the crisis. The special representative and head of office has been involved in AU processes, including most recently the Quintet Group on Sudan. Reopening the office involved a discussion with the AU Commission chairperson and a subsequent visit by Belaiche to Sudan to meet the head of Sudan's Sovereign Council and army chief. Although the meeting was fruitful, political and pragmatic concerns arose around the feasibility of the process.

Political and practical challenges

Belaiche's visit strengthened the AU's role as a pivotal continental actor, but concerns about the reopening of the office remain. First, the AU role may be considered partisan if consultations on the reopening are primarily with Sudan's Sovereign Council. The AU needs to summon political backing from all fronts to ensure that warring parties draw red lines on attacks on the office.

Secondly, the AU is engaged in multiple mediation processes to stabilise Sudan. The AU's intra-Sudanese dialogue provides a mediation and negotiation platform between the parties' political wings, being the transitional government and Tasis plus other political and civilian groups. As a member of the Quintet, the AU aims to undertake a broader political process to initiate state-building processes. These mediation forums may be jeopardised if the AU position is perceived as negatively affecting peace processes.

Thirdly, the office is likely to return to Khartoum. This could indicate a bias towards the de-facto government, raising security concerns given territorial

Current PSC Chairperson

H.E. Ambassador Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Permanent Representative of Uganda to the AU and PSC Chairperson for July 2026

PSC members

Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Lesotho, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, and Uganda

contestations. Several diplomatic missions were targeted during the early days of the fighting, particularly embassies with genuine or perceived allegiance to either side.

Beyond the safety and security of personnel and infrastructure, other practical concerns abound. Following Sudanese Armed Forces' recapture of Khartoum in April 2025, the transitional government has sought to rebuild the capital, yet there are significant limitations in water, electricity and internet provision. This may add an additional layer of practical challenges for the AU.

Expediency for the AU?

While primacy in diplomacy is important, it is necessary to examine the strategic objectives of reopening the office. In previous contexts, a fundamental objective was to oversee implementation of peace agreements such as the comprehensive peace agreement, the Doha Agreement and the power-sharing arrangement. However, warring parties are yet to reach a ceasefire arrangement. That said, there is room for the liaison office to enhance information exchange, exerting new pressure on the adversaries to commit to dialogue in good faith. It is important that the AU specify the mandate of the office for the time being.

Any liaison office has to create communication lines between the host state and the AU Commission to prevent and manage conflict, monitor the implementation of agreements and ensure information exchange.

Reestablishment of the office would secure the AU's role as the primary interlocutor in Sudan's peace processes and the only Quintet member with presence on the ground. Neither international nor regional organisations currently have a political presence in Sudan, with the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan having closed shop in February 2024. Similarly, most diplomatic missions relocated their Sudan embassies to neighbouring countries, limiting the direct information and exchange their foreign ministries may have had with Sudanese stakeholders.

This would provide the AU with a tangible advantage. It would be prudent for the liaison office to fully maximise on its ground presence and engage the plethora of professional unions, and civil and political formations.

A significant failure leading to the current conflict centres on the lack of inclusion and diversity of different political views and ideologies. Renewed presence should be utilised as an opportunity to meet with and integrate the voice and vision of all Sudanese actors.

The liaison office could exert new pressure on the adversaries to commit to dialogue in good faith

It's also essential to consider the quid pro quo of returning. For the transitional government, continental and international diplomatic recognition is paramount and is part of its strategy to defeat the Rapid Support Forces on all fronts.

There is a clear cost-benefit analysis to reopening the office. It is no longer merely a practical nor technical decision. It may offer pathways for the transitional government to influence AU decisions. As the AU implements the PSC decision, determining the scope and clearly linking the liaison office to its 'Roadmap for the resolution of the conflict in Sudan' are key. The upcoming PSC field mission in Sudan in mid-August offers an opportunity to further assess and act on the feasibility and value-add of the liaison office.

Conclusion

The PSC decision to reopen the office is more than a formality. It is a statement of intent signalling that the AU is unwilling to cede ground on Sudan's crisis to external actors. The office may give it greater political and pragmatic expediency in managing peace processes. Thus, the AU should consult the conflicting parties to ensure the safety of AU personnel and credibility of the office.

Physical presence will translate into impact only if the AU develops clear objectives in line with its roadmap and maintains a neutral mediation posture between the factions. The organisation's response in Sudan has been tested by years of competing and stalled processes. However, a return to Khartoum offers a narrow, but real, opportunity to reassert its relevance and contribute meaningfully to the cessation of hostilities, provided it avoids the pitfalls of symbolic and partisan diplomacy.

Improving compliance and accountability in AU peace operations

On 25 June, the PSC was briefed on the progress of implementing the AU compliance and accountability frameworks for peace support operations (PSOs). The AU compliance framework is the AU's permanent compliance and accountability framework. It integrates legal obligations, policies, mechanisms and responsibilities to ensure that PSOs comply with international humanitarian law, human rights standards and AU conduct guidelines.

The June briefing marked the PSC's first focused discussion on AUCF implementation since the 2017 endorsement. It coincided with the completion of the initial project phase of the AUCF tripartite AU-European Union (EU)-United Nations (UN) 2022 to 2025, which aimed to strengthen the AU's capacity to implement the AUCF. While progress has been made, practical adoption remains slow. The 1 352nd PSC communiqué requests further efforts to institutionalise the framework within PSOs and to extend it to peace operations led by regional economic communities and mechanisms.

Progress

For the AU, compliance grew from operational experience. A former AU official noted that, before the development of the AUCF, missions developed their own standard operating procedures for sexual exploitation and abuse, conduct, crisis reporting, hotlines and civilian harm in response to operational needs. These included the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and later the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

Somalia, however, showed the limits of relying solely on mission capacity and often ad hoc responses that led to fragmented authority and accountability. Additionally, the 2018 AU-UN review of AMISOM warned that the joint operations between it and Somali security forces could heighten violations and stressed the need for stronger compliance capacity and oversight.

The AU's compliance architecture has evolved through three overlapping phases (see Chart 1).

The first shift was political and normative, moving compliance from a broad pledge to a concrete, reportable obligation. PSC decisions gradually made compliance an operational requirement for AU peace

missions, including the 2017 request for updates on the AUCF and annual reports. In 2021, PSO effectiveness and integrity were linked to personnel performance and in 2021, AUCF obligations were included in the ATMIS mandate. While institutional oversight of AUCF implementation was PSC-mandated, it still needs to be regularised.

The second shift created a dispersed accountability system to manage responsibilities, information and follow-up across headquarters, missions, member states and T/PCCs. The PSC oversaw and coordinated the peace support operations directorate and designated roles for the office of internal oversight and office of the legal counsel, with T/PCCs investigating allegations and reporting to the AU.

Compliance was moved from a broad pledge to a concrete, reportable obligation

For instance, the AU-EU-UN partnership supported systems such as complaint mechanisms, communication guidelines and the Case management system to establish a shared accountability chain for handling allegations. This aimed to improve traceability of responsibilities and follow-up without centralising accountability in Addis Ababa. The complaint mechanism illustrates this logic: it connects receipt and documentation to investigation, communication with authorities, accountability follow-up and victim assistance, as needed.

The third shift was operational. In 2022, the PSC added AUCF compliance to the ATMIS mandate, leading to revisions to the rules of engagement, police directives and inquiry procedures aligned with AUCF standards, thereby enhancing incident reporting and investigations. The integrated compliance and accountability framework was included in the concept of operations for the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia, and was aligned with operational directives. The framework's remedial actions, including victim support and compensation, indicate that compliance addresses the consequences of conduct and aims to prevent violations. Three related implementation gaps remain.

Chart 1: Three phases of the AU compliance architecture

Phase	Institutional shift
Normative consolidation 2017–2023	• 2017: At the 689th PSC meeting, the report and implementation matrix for establishing the AUCF were adopted and regular updates were requested • The PSC, at its 813th meeting, adopted the AU policy on conduct and discipline for PSOs • 2018: Policy on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse for PSOs and the conduct and discipline policy adopted by the PSC • 2021: At its 986th meeting, the PSC linked the effectiveness and integrity of PSOs to personnel conduct in accordance with the AUCF, international humanitarian law and international human rights law • 2021: AU compliance and accountability training curriculum developed • 2022: The PSC embedded AUCF requirements into the ATMIS mandate • 2022: AU-EU-UN AUCF partnership project established • 2023: AU strategic framework for compliance and accountability in PSOs adopted by the Specialised Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security • 2023: AU policy on the selection and screening of personnel for PSOs • 2023: AU policy on protection of civilians in PSOs
Institutionalisation 2023–2025	• Revised ATMIS rules of engagement, police directives on the use of force and board of inquiry procedures • Guideline established for case management in PSOs • Remedial actions policy established • Guidance document for a standardised complaint and reporting mechanism • Guideline on communication with troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) on violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and misconduct of personnel • 2024: Curriculum on the protection of civilians developed • December 2025: Revised AU compliance and accountability training curriculum updated • 2025: Curriculum on investigations of misconduct developed • 2025: Inclusion of compliance obligations in the memorandum of understanding of T/PCCs • October 2025: The draft AU policy on compensation of third-party claims for PSOs reviewed
Operationalisation 2025 onwards	• Popularisation of the case management system • Regular reporting to the PSC

Source: PSC Report

Weak action and follow-up

Converting reporting into accountable action, with follow-up, remains weak. More difficult has been organising accountability across institutions with different responsibilities. The strategic framework divides implementation across strategic headquarters, missions and member states, including T/PCCs. Mission leadership must implement the framework, while different AU Commission offices coordinate, investigate and conduct legal functions and T/PCCs investigate allegations and report disciplinary or judicial action to the AU.

The AUCF does not centralise all accountability in Addis Ababa, but seeks to make a dispersed system more governable by clarifying how information, responsibility and follow-up move among actors. Although frameworks exist on paper, enforcement often depends on troop-contributing countries, making accountability uneven across missions. Weak follow-up and limited monitoring mechanisms further undermine implementation.

AU headquarters has sought to address this by establishing an AUCF coordination architecture involving departments and offices. However, competing institutional priorities, limited human resources and unclear reporting lines remain. While missions report misconduct and actions to the commissioner for political affairs, peace and security, these reports do not consistently reach the PSO directorate. The case management system is expected to address this gap by providing a centralised platform to capture and track misconduct, although its effectiveness will need to be determined during implementation.

For compliance oversight, every mission briefing to the PSC should include a section on implementing compliance obligations under PSC mandates. These updates should move beyond describing activities to reporting measurable progress, including allegations received, investigations undertaken, remedial actions implemented, civilian harm mitigation measures, implementation challenges and lessons identified.

Capacity and resource gaps

The AUCF requires missions to monitor and report incidents, investigate alleged non-compliance, track civilian harm and integrate compliance into operational

planning and review. These functions require specialist personnel, investigative expertise and functioning information systems. Yet, there is often insufficient capacity to ensure corrective action or systematically track implementation.

The most significant challenge is resourcing. Missions face severe staffing shortages that undermine their operational effectiveness. In Somalia, for example, the number of compliance officers has dropped from about 14 during AMISOM/ATMIS to only two in AUSSOM (although recruitments is ongoing). Similar capacity gaps exist within the Multinational Joint Task Force, which lacks compliance and human rights officers.

Compounding these constraints, AU officials report that the digital case management system software has expired due to the AU-EU-UN tripartite arrangement that funded the system, which concluded in 2025. Although the AU has budgeted additional funding for the system, internal procurement rules must be addressed to access this.

Holistic implementation

Implementation and absorption among regional economic communities is slow. Despite South African Development Community and Economic Community of West African States agreement and the development of roadmaps, ongoing support is needed to achieve operational compliance and accountability. The PSO directorate has conducted several training sessions with economic communities on its AUCF, but the sustainability of these resource-intensive sessions is in question.

Finally, AUCF sustainability remains uncertain as permanent obligations rely on temporary infrastructure. Much recent policy and operational development was supported through the AU-EU-UN trilateral project, underscoring the risks associated with donor-dependent compliance structures. Long-term financing is needed. Furthermore, the PSC should enhance institutional learning by ensuring that operational lessons from missions consistently influence continental policy. The development of the AUCF exemplifies how several AU-wide compliance policies emerged from innovations among missions. Thus, future reforms should prioritise field evidence alongside headquarters guidance.

Can the incoming ECOWAS Commission reclaim regional relevance?

The 69th Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit, held in Sierra Leone on 19 July 2026, marked the beginning of a key leadership transition.

Senegal, through President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, takes over from Sierra Leone as ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government chair for one year.

This comes as the region faces escalating security threats, democratic backsliding and fragmentation.

Faye's chairship will coincide with the first year of a Senegalese-led ECOWAS Commission, as General Birame Diop was appointed commission president for 2026 to 2030. Francess Piagie Alghali of Sierra Leone was named Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

Chart 2: Incoming ECOWAS Commission leadership

Position	Leadership team from September 2026–2030	Replacing	Background of appointed leaders
President	His Excellency General Birame Diop (Senegal)	Dr Omar Alieu Touray (The Gambia)	- Retired two-star air force general - Chief of staff of the Senegalese Air Force (2015–2017) - Chief of the general staff of the Armed Forces of Senegal - UN military adviser, Department of Peace Operations (May 2021–April 2024) - Minister of the Armed Forces of Senegal (2024–2026) - First Senegalese to hold the post since ECOWAS was founded in 1975
Vice-president	Anthony Ogunjimi (Nigeria)	Damtien L Tchintchibidja (Togo)	Former Senior Director, Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation (OAGF) and Former Director of Finance and Accounts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nominees			
Political Affairs, Peace and Security	Francess Piagie Alghali (Sierra Leone)	Ambassador Dr Abdel-Fatau Musah (Ghana)	- Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation - Previously minister of state, Office of the Vice-president - Former executive secretary, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
Economic Affairs and Agriculture	Dehpue Yenpea Zuo (Liberia)	Dr Kalilou Sylla (Côte d'Ivoire)	Deputy Minister for Economic Management
Internal Services	Dr Kalilou Sylla (Côte d'Ivoire)	Dr Habibu Yaya Bappah (Nigeria)	- Incumbent Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture, appointed in 2025, succeeding Massandje Touré-Litse - The only continuing member of the outgoing college
Infrastructure, Energy and Digitalisation	Amin Amidu Suleiman (Ghana)	Mr Sédiko Douka (Burkina Faso)	- Ghanaian diplomat and politician - Former minister of roads and highways - Former ambassador to Egypt - Former Upper West Regional Minister
Human Development and Social Affairs	Professor Nassirou Bako-Arifari (Benin)	Professor Fatou Sow Sarr (Senegal)	- Former member of the National Assembly of Benin - Former minister of foreign affairs, African integration, Francophonie and Beninese abroad

Source: PSC Report

The incoming commission leaders, whose tenure starts in September 2026, inherit an organisation facing crises of confidence and relevance following successive unconstitutional changes of government and worsening violent extremism in the Sahel, with its spillover. These upheavals triggered the organisation's fragmentation when Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger withdrew from ECOWAS in January 2025 and formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in September 2025.

While ECOWAS has achieved marked success from its regional mobility agenda and economic integration efforts, the incoming commission must improve relations with AES members and enhance the relevance of the bloc by addressing violent extremism and political instability in member states.

Rethinking fragmented plans

A major decision at the 69th summit was the endorsement of the revised roadmap for a 1 650-strong counter-terrorism brigade in the ECOWAS Standby Force, which should be fully operational in July 2027. While such a force is long overdue, it faces structural challenges to be resolved by the incoming commission with the ECOWAS authority.

First, ECOWAS tends to compartmentalise violent extremism along sub-regional lines rather than as a region-wide challenge. This has forced so-called affected states to deploy troops and resources, while those deemed unaffected remain reluctant to contribute. Notably, violent extremism in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger has long been regarded as a Sahel problem rather than a West Africa one.

That framing suppressed appetite for a collective ECOWAS response and pushed the affected states, together with Mauritania and Chad, to establish the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017. Chronically under-resourced, the force failed to yield results and was ultimately superseded by the AES and its Unified Force, a mechanism launched in December 2025 to combat terrorism in AES countries. However, it faced similar weaknesses.

The dormant Accra Initiative, also established in 2017, was to address the spillover of extremist threats to the coastal countries of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and

Benin. The initiative failed to make headway because it did not confront the threat holistically.

The Boko Haram crises followed suit. Although it affected Nigeria and Niger alongside Cameroon and Chad, it was managed as a Lake Chad Basin problem rather than one needing an ECOWAS-wide response in partnership with the neighbouring REC i.e the Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCAS). This led to the reactivation of Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force. In each case, ECOWAS supplied political endorsement and diplomatic backing for resource mobilisation, but the sub-regional framing and limited intelligence sharing foreclosed a holistic strategy.

The planned counter-terrorism brigade is a chance to break that pattern, but only if troops and funding are provided collectively. Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and The Gambia have signalled willingness to contribute. The remaining member states must do likewise, since the threat could go beyond the frontline countries. As violent extremism spreads across the continent, the African Union must finalise the African Standby Force's specialised counter-terrorism unit to support the ECOWAS brigade.

ECOWAS compartmentalises violent extremism sub-regionally rather than region-wide

Secondly, ECOWAS must go beyond bolstering its brigade to partnering with the African Union to provide technical and financial support to the AES Unified Force. ECOWAS has already identified cooperation with AES as pivotal to preserving regional mobility and economic exchanges and to the success of its brigade. But is the development ironic for the AES, which has long had to deal with extremism without meaningful ECOWAS intervention.

The brigade became an ECOWAS Commission priority in 2023 following the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. These rapidly spilt over, with extremist activities becoming entrenched from the Sahel to coastal countries and increasing convergence with Lake Chad Basin extremist groups.

The ECOWAS special envoy on counter-terrorism was appointed in July 2023, when the situation had become dire. The move came too late, as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS a month after the December 2023 summit, forming the AES on 16 September 2024. The brigade could, therefore, seem to AES states as a containment force, thereby deepening grievances with ECOWAS.

Consequently, the brigade can be successful only if the operational strategy is aligned with that of the 6 000-strong AES Unified Force. This involves providing technical and financial support to the force to degrade extremists from within, thereby addressing deep-seated grievances against ECOWAS for its reluctance to respond in the Sahel until AES countries withdraw. This takes into account that the brigade's operational theatre borders countries where the problems are rooted and ECOWAS has no control.

Preventing the whitewashing of coups and democratic subversions

The incoming commission must rebuild the credibility of ECOWAS normative frameworks and responses. This is because the AES effect engendered an ECOWAS that is less resolute in its response to unconstitutional changes of government and democratic subversions.

Notably, when the Guinea-Bissau coup occurred in November 2025, ECOWAS did not display its usual strong stance against coups. This was because the event took place after the official withdrawal of AES members in January 2025. ECOWAS, at its December 2025 summit, rejected the one-year transition proposal by the junta and threatened to impose economic and financial sanctions if it wasn't withdrawn. The junta resisted and retained its transition roadmap. A constitutional referendum is scheduled for 30 August 2026 and general election for 6 December 2026.

At the recently concluded ECOWAS summit, no sanctions nor threat of sanctions were voiced to deter violations. Rather, ECOWAS noted 'efforts underway in Guinea-Bissau to conclude the country's political transition'. Although the interim military president and prime minister are barred from running in the upcoming election, elements of the military and their proxies may

run because the coup-to-ballot pathway has been normalised by the Guinea precedent.

ECOWAS, like the AU, lifted all sanctions on Guinea after the junta ran for and won the election. This violated Article 12 of the Supplementary Act A/SP.13/02/12 on Sanctions Against Member States that Fail to Honour their Obligations to ECOWAS. The act stipulates that the perpetrators of coups and their accomplices shall not stand for presidential office in their member states and that ECOWAS and its members shall not recognise governments that obtained power this way.

The AU must finalise the African Standby Force's specialised counter-terrorism unit

In the past, ECOWAS pressured juntas to organise elections, which they never contested, leaving room for civilians to run and win. The precedent set by the Guinea situation erodes the credibility of ECOWAS's normative framework and highlights a more cautious body bent on preserving relations with incumbents.

ECOWAS's inability to address military coups can be attributed to a failure to address governance deficits by incumbent democrats proactively. Since July 2024, successive ECOWAS summits have made no reference to the review of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, a process it initiated in 2021 after the Guinea coup.

Following several consultations, a final draft was developed in 2023. Senior commission officials confirm that finalisation of the revised protocol has stalled due to objections from member states to presidential term limits, injunctions against constitutional manipulations and enforcement mechanisms. These were the issues that halted the protocol review in 2015.

The new commission must work with ECOWAS leaders to address the growing impression of double standards within the organisation through strong accountability measures for incumbent democrats as for juntas. The new commission will be only as effective as the strength of ECOWAS authority backing. But it has the potential to inject new ideas and strategies into the ongoing ECOWAS effort to rebrand itself and achieve a fully integrated community of peoples in a peaceful, prosperous region.

Women's voices could help silence the guns in Africa

From 12 to 13 June 2026, the AU Silencing the Guns (StG) unit met with the Mano River Union (MRU) secretariat, to enhance the roles of regional actors and communities in StG. The Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire meeting – the latest in a series initiated by the AU unit – focused on strengthening women's leadership in StG, particularly in the MRU region.

The role of women has been central to the AU's agenda for at least the last decade, with efforts to develop conducive frameworks. These include the AU Maputo Protocol to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in PSOs. Others are the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the AU strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018 to 2028).

Social and institutional barriers prevent women from fulfilling their potential in peacebuilding initiatives

Efforts by FemWise-Africa have led to the standardisation of women's participation in AU preventive diplomacy and electoral observer missions under the Continental Results Framework. These initiatives guide women's participation in continental peace and security processes, including StG. In addition, the AU Commission has established a women, peace and security (WPS) office, currently spearheaded by Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, special envoy of the AU Commission Chairperson on WPS.

Since her appointment in August 2025, she has sought to bolster coordination with key stakeholders, including regional economic communities, the PSC, other AU structures and development partners. The aim is to promote women's full and meaningful participation in continental peace and security and enhance the AU WPS office's connection with communities.

However, despite growing recognition of the importance of women's leadership in StG, much remains to be done. Social and institutional barriers prevent women from fulfilling their potential in community, national and continental initiatives.

Women in StG

At its 1 309th meeting, in October 2025, the PSC reiterated the pivotal role of women. The Council acknowledged that women's inclusion brings empathy, moral authority and sustainability to peace and security processes. In the same vein, the StG engagement with the MRU secretariat highlighted the important role women play in fostering sustainable peace through community-level early warning and mediation.

Their proximity to and often direct involvement in local realities make women indispensable actors. Given their daily cross-border activities, such as trade and farming – across the MRU region, for instance – women relate to state security forces and non-state armed groups. They can gather granular data essential for early warning and security threat anticipation. Sources state that information provided by women has allowed security forces to gain strategic advantages over criminal groups operating across the region's porous borders.

Women, according to civil society representatives, have helped defuse several communal conflicts in the area. In western Côte d'Ivoire, for example, according to the chairperson of the MRU Joint Civil Society Organisations Border Units, they have assuaged their husbands and male relatives amid heightened tensions over resources, including land.

Women's inclusion brings empathy, moral authority and sustainability to peace and security processes

They have facilitated peaceful resolution of herder and farmer conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, advising men behind the scenes. Similarly, in the Southern Africa Development Community and the Horn of Africa, women have contributed significantly to institutional actions against organised crime and counter-terrorism. These contributions are key to the success of the StG agenda, given the strategic lessons they offer for its ongoing and future processes. Strengthening women's participation in StG is, therefore, pivotal.

Challenges

However, age-old social and institutional barriers impede participation. In many African societies, women are viewed as mere caregivers or community members lacking the ability of men to take part in political and policy decision-making. Thus, their access to peacemaking and conflict-prevention efforts is severely limited.

And, while Africa has made strides in primary school gender parity, a growing gap at secondary and tertiary levels has been noticeable over the last decade. Beyond economic reasons, millions of girls have dropped out of school due to safety concerns, early marriage or lack of menstrual management. This, combined with stereotyping, prevents women from accessing essential networks and resources to lead peace processes.

Institutionally, women are excluded from decision-making and negotiation, leading again to male-dominated interventions and limited meaningful participation of females in government roles. Although consulted informally, mainly through civil society organisations, they remain underrepresented in official delegations at the forefront of peace talks and security initiatives.

This, according to experts, is the result of inconsistent implementation of gender commitments and inclusion mechanisms by member states. Limited funding, weak enforcement and inadequate accountability mechanisms are cited among the main causes of states' slow progress. The StG engagement in Abidjan confirmed the existence of such obstacles in the MRU region and beyond.

Women-led formal and informal organisations often lack the funds to participate in consultations, mediation and shuttle diplomacy. Many of these organisations, according to representatives of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), are barely able to cover accommodation, travel and subsistence costs. Women's organisations and networks remain dependent on short-term donor funding rather than sustained institutional support.

Possible solutions

The AU, through the AU Commission, could tackle social barriers, promoting positive social norms and women's

leadership in line with the AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment (2018–2028). Beyond institutional engagements with regional economic communities and similar entities, the AU could liaise with local civil society organisations to challenge stereotypes. It could assign women role models to high-level and local mediation, negotiation and peacebuilding efforts.

AU engagement with member states, regional entities, local civil society organisations and potential partners would enhance women's prominence. This could be accompanied by training in areas such as mediation, leadership and conflict prevention. Mentorship linking experienced female leaders with communities could be considered. All could be coordinated by the special envoy on WPS, with regular and timely reporting to the PSC.

The AU could assign women role models to high-level and local mediation and peacebuilding efforts

Institutionally, accountability and implementation should be strengthened within the AU and member states. Exclusive reliance on member states' reporting under the Continental Results Framework on WPS and other frameworks is insufficient for effective accountability. According to an AU source, inconsistent and irregular submission of reports continues to undermine comprehensive assessments of implementation, progress and impact across the continent, despite efforts by the special envoy. A monitoring system blending member-state, civil society and community reporting could close the gap in the mid- and long-term, as requested by the PSC.

Finally, financial support for women's participation in continental peace processes should be a priority. Financial challenges have often deprived initiatives of women's crucial insights and strategic vision that could strengthen negotiation outcomes. Given the central role women could play in stabilising Africa, their voices must be heard in strategic decision-making, beyond symbolic participation. Thus, engagements such as the recent StG-MRU meeting should be encouraged.

Gabon promotes integrated solutions for political stability and peace in Africa

Gabon's experience demonstrates the importance of dialogue and addressing root causes during a political transition. Her Excellency Ms Lilly Stella Ngyema Ndong, Ambassador of Gabon to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the AU, shares her views with the *PSC Report*.

The Gabonese Republic has regained its right to participate in AU activities after a transition period of nearly two years following an unconstitutional change of government (UCG). What lessons could your country draw from this experience, particularly with regard to its relations with the AU and ECCAS?

Gabon is pleased to be back within the great AU family, to which it has always belonged since its creation. After 19 months of transition, conducted scrupulously and methodically, and thanks to the holding of free and transparent elections, Gabon achieved a return to constitutional order, consolidated by the renewal and restoration of its institutions. This transition offers several lessons worth sharing.

First, it highlights the importance of providing contextualised support, that is, support grounded in the realities of each country and its population. Second, it is essential to prioritise constructive dialogue over a logic of isolation or total exclusion. Respect for AU instruments is important, but it must be accompanied by ongoing dialogue between the transitional authorities, the AU and, of course, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). This dialogue at the political level helps build trusting and peaceful relations and defuse tensions, helping the country understand that it is in its own interest to achieve a swift return to constitutional order.

Moreover, our experience also underscores the need to address the root causes of unconstitutional changes of government. Holding elections is not an end in itself: it must be preceded by reforms aimed at consolidating the rule of law, strengthening state institutions, promoting good governance and improving the socio-economic conditions of the population. It is precisely this work of restoring institutions and cleaning up governance, both political and economic and social, in particular through an inclusive national dialogue initiated beforehand by

the Gabonese government, that made it possible to hold democratic, credible and inclusive presidential and legislative elections.

Lastly, the development, from the very start of the transition, of a clear roadmap backed by a realistic timeline, together with the firm resolve of the authorities to honour their commitments, were decisive factors. Gabon's case demonstrates that a political transition conducted in a spirit of responsibility and inclusiveness, with adequate support from regional and continental organisations, can enable a peaceful return to constitutional order and, above all, the consolidation of institutional stability.

Gabon's return to the AU was marked by its recent election as a member state of the PSC. What are your country's main priorities in this role?

Our experience of the transition reinforced a conviction long held within our diplomatic culture: conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy remain the best tools for combating political and security instability in Africa. It is this conviction that prompted the Gabonese government to put forward its candidacy for the PSC. For its term, which runs from 2026 to 2028, Gabon therefore aspires to serve the African peoples and contribute to the consolidation of lasting peace. To this end, our priorities will be:

- **Conflict prevention**, in particular through the promotion of dialogue, mediation and good offices, and peacebuilding, especially for countries in post-conflict situations.
- **Strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)** through adequate funding and the fuller operationalisation of the African Standby Force (ASF). With this in mind, President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema has decided to make a voluntary contribution of US\$500 000 to the Peace Fund.

Furthermore, we believe that Gabon's recent experience could be useful to other countries facing a political transition. President Oligui Nguema has already provided a concrete illustration of this by recently receiving Colonel Michael Randrianirina, President of the Transition in Madagascar.

Lastly, Gabon wishes to pay particular attention to environmental security issues. We believe the Peace and Security Council should take up the issue of the illicit exploitation of natural resources more actively, as it is one of the factors fuelling conflict on the continent.

The PSC should address more fully natural resource exploitation, which fuels continental conflict

Amid ever fiercer international competition for access to Africa's strategic minerals, these resources are becoming a major issue for stability and sovereignty. It is therefore essential to promote better governance of this wealth by strengthening national ownership of its extraction and value addition. The President of Gabon has made the local processing of natural resources a strategic pillar of his development agenda.

The impact of climate change on peace and security is also a central concern. Desertification, growing water scarcity, population displacement and mounting pressure on natural resources are exacerbating tensions and conflicts. Africa must speak with one voice and promote a common position so that international responses fully take into account the continent's realities and priorities.

Given the ongoing crises in the DRC, Sudan and the Sahel, many observers believe that the PSC's impact remains limited, while external actors have taken the lead in peace negotiations. What steps can the PSC take to reassert its authority?

The maintenance of peace and security falls under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council. Today, owing to the erosion of multilateralism, which we deplore, this essential UN mission is being weakened and undermined. This fosters the emergence of crises whose solutions are no longer the subject of consensus, but



Her Excellency Ms Lilly Stella Ngyema Ndong

are instead shaped and dictated by individual States or coalitions of States acting in their own interests.

That said, at the global level, Africa and its populations are the most affected by conflict. We cannot always rely on the intervention of the UN Security Council, particularly in this period of major geopolitical upheaval. The AU must reclaim the initiative in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Sahel. Our capacity to propose viable solutions, our commitment to supporting countries in crisis, and the establishment of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of peace agreements will make the PSC a central and reliable actor in resolving African conflicts.

To achieve this, adequate and predictable funding is naturally required. The decision taken at the last Summit to raise the AU Peace Fund to US\$1 billion is commendable, but Member States must now be convinced to honour their financial commitments. These funds should make it possible to revive the ASF.

Coordination between the PSC and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms has long been an obstacle to establishing a unified institutional response to crises in Africa. With the signing of the memorandum of understanding on the use of the African Standby Force and the progress made in clarifying the division of roles, should we expect improvement in this area?

Today we welcome the growing synergy of activities and the institutionalisation of meetings between the PSC, the RECs and RMs. It should not be forgotten that the principle of subsidiarity must be respected and grounded in the comparative advantages of the AU and these regional institutions.

The signing of the memorandum of understanding on the use of the ASF establishes the framework for structured and robust cooperation, and is therefore to be welcomed. We believe it will help strengthen the operational readiness, responsiveness and effectiveness of the ASF, in particular through the finalisation of strategic planning and the operational guidance framework.

In political circles, it is said that, given the weak implementation of PSC decisions, the Council needs in-depth reform to move from being a decision-making body to an operational one. What is your response to this?

I believe we must first avoid being overly harsh in our assessment. The Peace and Security Council has delivered important progress in conflict prevention, mediation and crisis response. That said, it is true that the implementation of some of its decisions falls short of expectations. This situation is mainly explained by several factors.

The first reason relates to a lack of resources. The AU has solid instruments and a robust normative framework, but it often lacks the financial, logistical and operational means needed to implement well-intentioned decisions. Gabon advocates for strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture through more autonomous, predictable and sustainable financing of African conflict prevention and management mechanisms.

The second challenge is political in nature. The Council's effectiveness depends on its members' ability to forge consensus in the continent's higher interest. We must

continue to promote dialogue and African solidarity so that national considerations do not take precedence over collective priorities.

Transforming the PSC into a more operational body is a legitimate question that deserves frank and honest debate. In my view, before even reconsidering the Council's mandate, it is essential to give it the means to fully exercise the responsibilities that Member States have already entrusted to it. This is not only an institutional question, but also a political, financial and operational one.

Ongoing reflection and dialogue will create an AU that fulfils the aspirations and interests of the people

Lastly, we need a more integrated approach to peace and security. Conflicts often originate in challenges related to development, governance, inequality, climate change or the illicit exploitation of natural resources. Strengthening peace in Africa requires acting on these levers simultaneously.

Gabon supports all reforms likely to make the PSC more effective, more responsive and more pragmatic. We are convinced that a stronger AU, equipped with high-performing institutions and resources commensurate with its ambitions, will be better placed to meet the expectations of the African peoples. It is by encouraging this kind of reflection and dialogue that we will help build a more effective and credible AU, one that better serves the aspirations and interests of the people.

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.

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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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