Strengthening Popular Participation in the African Union

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Peace and Security Council (PSC)

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) was established as an organ of the AU under a protocol to the Constitutive Act adopted by the AU Assembly in July 2002. The protocol defines the PSC as a collective security and early warning arrangement to facilitate timely and effective response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa.

The PSC has the power, among other things, to authorise peace support missions, to impose sanctions in case of unconstitutional change of government, and to ‘take initiatives and action it deems appropriate’ in response to potential or actual conflicts. The PSC is a decision-making body in its own right, and its decisions are binding on Member States.

Article 4 of the Constitutive Act, repeated in article 4 of the PSC Protocol, recognises the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State in case of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Any decision to intervene in a Member State under article 4 of the Constitutive Act will be made by the Assembly on the recommendation of the PSC.

The Peace and Security Council is also responsible for implementation of the Non-aggression and Common Defence Pact adopted in 2005, among whose commitments are that ‘State Parties undertake to prohibit and prevent genocide, other forms of mass murder as well as crimes against humanity’.

The PSC comprises 15 Member States with equal voting rights elected by the Assembly for two- or three-year terms.

The Council operates at three levels:

- Heads of state – must meet at least once a year
- Ministerial representatives – must meet at least once a year
- Permanent representatives – must meet twice a month and more often if required

The Chairperson of the Council can call a meeting at any time.

Since it first met in 2004, the PSC has been active in relation to the crises in Darfur, Comoros, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire and other countries. It has recommended the creation of AU peacekeeping operations in Somalia and Darfur, and the imposition of sanctions against persons undermining peace and security (such as
travel bans and asset freezes imposed in 2007 against the leaders of a rebellion in Comoros). The Council is overseeing the establishment of the AU Standby Force which will serve as a permanent African security force. There are proposals to involve the PSC in the enforcement of the decisions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Article 20 of the PSC protocol requires the PSC to encourage civil society organisations ‘to participate actively in the efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in Africa’ and allows the PSC to invite them to address it directly. In December 2008, the PSC adopted a document setting out the modalities for interaction with civil society organisations, known as the ‘Livingstone Formula’. The formula provides for the PSC to consult with ECOSOCC and invite individual civil society organisations to address its meetings. Civil society organisations from both Kenya and Zimbabwe have briefed members of the PSC on events in their countries, and South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies has formally briefed the PSC itself.

The PSC Secretariat is based in the Peace and Security Department at the AU Commission headquarters in Addis Ababa.

PSC documents available by searching the AU website:
www.africa-union.org

Institute for Security Studies website on African organisations, with links to the AU and PSC documents:
www.issafrica.org/organisations.php
NGO Action: SaferAfrica and SalaamNet

SaferAfrica, a South African NGO, provided support to the AU Commission’s Peace and Security Department which led to the Executive Council’s adoption of a policy on post-conflict reconstruction and development at the June 2006 summit in Banjul, Gambia. SaferAfrica led the team that drafted the policy framework after several experts’ meetings on peacekeeping, reconstruction and stability. SaferAfrica will provide a pool of technical experts to support implementation at regional and national levels.

SaferAfrica: www.saferafrica.org/progs/peace/pcrd.php

SalaamNet was formed in November 2006 as a network to provide the AU and its partners with detailed research and analysis to inform conflict resolution and prevention. Composed largely of NGOs, with a secretariat based at the Institute for Security Studies (South Africa) office in Addis Ababa, SalaamNet aims to enhance the capacity of African civil society and the continental institutions to produce high quality research on conflict issues, and to play a complementary role to other continental structures, including ECOSOCC and the RECs, as well as the Peace and Security Council.

Salaamnet: www.salaamnet.org