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**INAUGURAL LESSONS LEARNED FORUM ON AU PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS AND THE
AFRICAN STANDBY FORCE**

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**CONCLUSIONS
OF THE INAUGURAL LESSONS LEARNED FORUM ON AU PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS
AND THE AFRICAN STANDBY FORCE**



CONCLUSIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African Union (AU) Commission, in collaboration with the Federal Republic of Nigeria held the Inaugural Lessons Learned Forum (LLF) on AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) and the African Standby Force (ASF) from 1 to 3 November, 2022 in Abuja, Nigeria. The Inaugural LLF was officially opened by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Geoffrey Onyeama. In his opening remarks, he emphasized the need for workable solutions and models of operations to be based on the lessons from the twenty-seven (27) Africa-Led PSOs conducted in the past twenty (20) years, considering the peculiarities of each country where PSOs are required and deployed.

2. The Inaugural LLF was held on the initiative of the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Bankole Adeoye, who, in his opening statement underscored that the LLF was born out of the realisation and need to learn lessons across PSOs in Africa, noting similarities in the challenges experienced and opportunities for their enhancement and effectiveness. Within this context, the LLF was aimed at identifying lessons from PSOs conducted by the AU since 2003, to inform the reconceptualization and full utilization of the ASF. Specifically, the Forum assessed how the implementation of AU PSOs have been facilitated; ascertained the various ways in which the ASF has been utilized since its establishment; and identified key lessons that can contribute towards the full operationalization and utilization of the ASF.

3. Opening statements were also delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Namibia to the AU and Chairperson of the AU PSC for the month of November 2022, Ambassador Emilia Mkusa, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS), Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah, as well as the Director General of the National Intelligence Agency of Nigeria. The forum brought together military, civilian and police Senior Mission Leaders from the various AU mandated and authorised missions; regional representatives of the AU PSC the Military Staff Committee (MSC), RECs/RMs, relevant representatives from the AU Commission, Troop/Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs), relevant representatives from the Republic of Nigeria, as well as strategic partners and experts.

4. The Inaugural LLF focused on five major segments namely:

- i. Mandating, Mission Planning, Deployment and Exit of PSOs: Lessons for the reconceptualization of the ASF;
- ii. Mandate Implementation and Mission Management;
- iii. Compliance and Accountability to International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights as well as Conduct and Discipline;
- iv. Strengthening regional cooperation and international strategic partnerships and resourcing of PSOs; and
- v. Experiences and Lessons for the Future.

II. SUMMARY OF KEY OUTCOMES

5. During the three (3) days of presentations and deliberations, several lessons were identified, and includes the following:

a. On mandating, mission planning, deployment and exit of PSOs: Lessons for the reconceptualization of the ASF:

6. The Inaugural LLF concluded that the mandating and authorization processes between the AU PSC and the UNSC, as well as with the relevant policy organs of the RECs/RMs needs to be better harmonized. This should include clear modalities for early consultations and joint analysis to enable political and strategic convergence regarding the common objectives to be achieved, as well as the sources of required resources for the agreed timeframe of a mission. This is to ensure that resources fully match the mandates given to PSOs.

7. The need for clearer mandates and political will across all phases of PSOs was also emphasised, including measurable benchmarks and conditions for success agreed upon between the AU (or RECs/RMs) and host states to ensure they are attainable. This should also include clear understanding of the requirements for PSOs, combat readiness and adaptability, as well as effective command and control of the forces in its response to insecurity.

8. Additionally, it was indicated that clear understanding of the role of bilateral operations within the same theatre as multilateral PSOs is critical for coherence and coordination, noting that the objectives to be achieved should be the same, including the need for alignment of efforts towards the protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups for stabilization and sustainable peace.

b. On Mandate Implementation and Mission Management

9. The LLF raised the critical importance of comprehensive technical assessments to guide mission planning and management. In this connection, it was reiterated that the planning assumptions that a mission's Concept of Operations is based on should be sound, realistic and achievable within agreed timeframe. In this regard, the need for the required capacity and resources to be made available and put in place was also emphasised to guarantee effective mission start-up, mandate implementation, as well as clear transition modalities and exit strategy.

10. Within this context, adequate staffing and capacity of the AU and RECs/RMs planning elements, strategic guidance documents and processes, finances, procurement systems, logistics and administrative procedures which are critical for effective mission planning, management and liquidation were also outlined as critical for effective implementation and management of missions. Similarly, effective coordination of substantive and administrative processes, as well as smooth communication between field missions and strategic headquarters is required - with attention to the duty of care of personnel deployed in the field.

c. On compliance and Accountability to International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights as well as Conduct and Discipline

11. The Forum appreciated the comprehensive nature of the AU Compliance and Accountability Framework (AUCF) for PSOs which elaborates the commitment of the AU and Member States to international Human Rights Law (IHRL), International Humanitarian Law (IHL), Conduct and Discipline as well as the protection of civilians, including women and children in the conduct of PSOs. Within this context, the Forum commended the Commission for the approaches it follows, across preventive, response and remedial actions, as well as for the long-term partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children and other relevant institutions that continue to support the efforts of the AU in this regard.

12. The meeting expressed satisfaction and appreciation for the AU-EU-UN Tripartite Project on the AUCF that operates at the intersection of the three institutions and a demonstration of how multilateral institutions can work together on shared objectives and in harmonizing efforts towards a common goal. In this regard, it was noted that the issue of compliance should not be seen as a conditionality for financing, but as an important element in enabling the AU, RECs/RMs and Member States to continue demonstrating their commitments to these international obligations in the conduct of PSOs.

13. The Forum also emphasised the need for adequate interface with host states of PSOs, as well as key stakeholders in the field to ensure adherence to these international norms and standards. This should include support by PSOs through effective training, advocacy and mainstreaming of these processes across the lifespan of all PSOs. In this connection, it was agreed that the AUCF should continue being an integral part of the planning, implementation, management and liquidation processes of all AU PSO.

d. On strengthening regional cooperation and international strategic partnerships and resourcing of PSOs

14. It was noted that no institution can single-handedly address conflicts effectively as required. In this regard, it was reiterated that enhanced relationship between the AU and RECs/RMs, increased strategic partnerships between the AU and UN, as well as predictable, adequate and sustainable funding for Africa-Led PSOs should be prioritised to guarantee effective PSOs. In this context, it was indicated that the AU continues in its efforts to operationalize its Peace Fund and will submit a Common Africa Position Paper to the 36th Assembly of the Union for consideration regarding the issue of financing of Africa-Led PSOs by the UN – using UN Assessed Contributions.

15. In this connection, the Commission will jointly prepare with the UN, the Report of the UN Secretary General that is due to the UN Security Council in April 2023 on steps towards the AU's access to UN Assessed Contributions for PSOs that will be authorised by the UN Security Council, on a case-by-case basis. In this regard, the AU will use this opportunity to outline the progress achieved in enhancing the AUCF for PSOs, as well as in establishing robust accountability mechanisms and on increasing contributions from AU Member States to the Peace Fund that will progressively enable the AU to fund some of its own priority initiatives in the future.

e. On experiences and lessons for the future

16. It was noted that there is need for the reconceptualization and alignment of the ASF with the current PSO practices and realities, using the lessons from the experiences of the 27 PSOs conducted during the past 20 years. This is in consideration of the fact that whilst the ASF was envisioned to be continentally coordinated and utilized by the AU, it has been regionally facilitated and owned by the RECs/RMs. In this regard, the objective of the reconceptualization of the ASF should be to enhance its framework, utility and effectiveness, taking note of the current conflict context which had prompted the deployment of ad hoc coalitions. This thus points to the need for the reconceptualization to ensure a strong ASF that is fit for purpose to ensure its full operationalization and utilization.

17. The meeting also agreed on the need for common understanding and agreement on what should constitute RECs/RMs mandated operations, and the support required of the AU, vis-a-vis operations that transcends regional boundaries that the AU should mandate and coordinate, working closely with the concerned RECs/RMs. As a result, the modalities for consultations, coordination and required support of these two types of operations should be differentiated to ensure clear mandates, effective planning and implementation as well as management and oversight.

18. The meeting further identified that attention to the image created by the AU to the host country and the broader international community which is based on the capacity and ability of AU PSOs to implement and achieve its mandate is critical. This, thus, should be built on strategic and smart partnerships that are value driven and which will enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the AU to the citizens of the host state. Within this context, commitment of the AU and its PSOs in the effective implementation of its mandate and tasks, including the ability to support the host state in moving from conflict to peace, as well as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and social media for greater advocacy and popularization of the achievements of a PSO is critical.

III. CONCLUSION

19. Considering the above, the Inaugural LLF concluded by:

- i. Commending the Commission for conducting this Inaugural Lessons Learned Forum and called on the need for it to become a biennial initiative to enable continuous learning platform that should contribute to the enhancement of the ASF and PSOs;
- ii. Requesting the Commission, as well as RECs/RMs to utilize the lessons identified to further enhance ongoing Africa-Led PSOs, as well as to inform the review of the ASF Concept and reconceptualization of the ASF, with a view to ensure it is aligned with the African Union Doctrine on Peace Support Operations (PSO) and is fit for purpose to address peace and security challenges on the continent;
- iii. Requesting the Commission, as well as RECs/RMs to determine what should constitute RECs/RMs mandated operations vis-a-vis operations that transcends regional boundaries that the AU should mandate and coordinate, as well as the

required consultations, decision-making processes, including resources and support to effectively facilitate these two types of operations;

- iv. Reiterating the need for clear understanding of the role of bilateral operations within the same theatre of operations as multilateral PSOs for coherence, coordination, and alignment of efforts to achieve stabilization and sustainable peace;
- v. Reiterating that the AUCF should continue being an integral part of the planning, implementation, management, and liquidation processes of all AU PSO;
- vi. Requesting that based on the outcomes of this LLF, the ASF framework should be utilized in the mandating, implementation, management, and oversight of all PSOs going forward to ensure enhanced AU-RECs/RMs relations and collaboration in the prevention, response and resolution of conflicts on the continent;
- vii. Requesting the Commission to continue in its efforts to operationalize the Peace Fund and submit a Common Africa Position Paper to the 36th Assembly of the Union for consideration regarding the issue of financing of Africa-Led PSOs by the UN using UN Assessed Contributions;
- viii. Reiterated that the United Nations Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security according to Article 17 of the PSC Protocol; and
- ix. Commended the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the facilities provided towards the successful hosting of the inaugural Lessons Learned Forum. In this regard, noted the proposal of the Nigerian government through the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Geoffrey Onyeama, to host subsequent lessons-learning forums on AU PSOs and ASF, in Abuja.