



Speech

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By Comfort Ero, Crisis Group Africa Program Director, to the 975th session of the African Union Peace and Security Council

Peace, Security and Development: Taking Security Challenges into Account in Development Financing

Your Excellency, Ambassador Baye Moutar Diop, permanent representative of the Republic of Senegal to the African Union (AU) and AU Peace and Security chairperson, thank you for giving the International Crisis Group the opportunity to address the AU Peace and Security Council on this important theme of “Peace, Security and Development: Taking Security Challenges into Account in Development Financing”. It is an honour for us to be invited to this important chamber and to present to your excellencies – permanent representatives to the AU – and to be on the panel with Smail Chergui, AU commissioner for peace and security; Vera Songwe, executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa; Hannah Tetteh, UN under-secretary-general, special representative of the secretary-general to the AU and head of the UN Office to the African Union; and Dr Paul Mpuga, chief country economist for Ethiopia at the African Development Bank.

Your excellencies, the International Crisis Group is an independent organisation working to prevent wars and shape policies that will build a more peaceful world. Crisis Group aspires to be the pre-eminent organisation providing independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage deadly conflict.

Your excellencies, we are receptive to the twin concerns of today’s session: debt relief

or cancellation and how to engage donors on an integrative approach to addressing peace, security and development. The ideas raised in the concept note for the AU Peace and Security Council session take on an urgent meaning today in the context of the economic cost of COVID-19 and growing debt distress. Indeed, the impact of coronavirus is leaving a number of the poorest countries in the world facing the prospect of five to ten years of depressed development.

To this end, asking donors to think through how they can offer flexibility in determining the criteria for debt relief or cancellation to countries in conflict situations, including those affected by terrorism and violent extremism, has some important merit today. Indeed, just on the eve of this meeting, in recognition of the huge burden that now confronts countries in conflict and fragile states, Crisis Group stated that “for countries grappling with conflict, climate change or both, the [COVID-19] pandemic has hit at an especially inauspicious time” and called on “wealthy countries to take the long view and act boldly to forgive the debts of poor countries and expand emergency financial assistance.”

So, this Council’s session is a timely one. Also, some donors have already moved toward more joined-up approaches to peace, security and development. There are instances where development funds have been diverted to

finance peace and security, and some donors have already made the leap of seeing development assistance as part of national security, seeking to harmonise what they do developmentally with peace and security and conflict prevention. The December 2019 U.S. Global Fragility Act, for example, seeks to offer a coherent whole-of-government approach to the prevention of conflict and violent extremism. A stabilisation and prevention fund was established to focus on conflict-affected areas, including reforms of the security and justice sectors. The focus is on ensuring legitimate, rights-based institutions and an end to corruption in both sectors, as well as countering threats to stability. The question remains, though, how much COVID-19 has reduced the funding that would support this initiative.

In Europe, the European Union (EU) sees security as a precondition for development, which allows it to tackle security through development funding. This year, the EU will introduce new ways of financing African peace and security through the European Peace Facility (EPF). With a global reach and a budget of €5 billion for the period 2021-2027, this new initiative, as Crisis Group recently noted, could include support for ad hoc military coalitions as well as direct military assistance, including lethal weaponry and equipment, to African armies. Through the EPF, Brussels will be able to directly finance both a broader range of African-led peace support operations and coalitions and direct training and equipment for national armies. The new instrument will afford Brussels new flexibility to pay for military equipment for African (and other) armies, including arms and ammunition, which the EU was unable to fund previously. This development is significant. We have underlined the opportunities before the EPF, as well as the risks it presents, stressing the importance of AU oversight to ensure that this new financing does not aggravate conflicts.

Your excellencies, in answering the question in your concept note of how to achieve flexibility on debt relief and urge external partners to prioritise investments in the security sector, I

would like to set out five points for your consideration:

First, your excellencies may want to consider what realistic criteria or standards should be developed to qualify for debt relief and cancellation for the purposes of security assistance. Understandably, there are concerns about sovereignty and transparency, particularly given sensitivities around security matters, but international partners are likely to insist on seeing a country's overall strategy for the security sector, as well as counter-insurgency plans for reaching sustainable peace and security.

Secondly, the concept note emphasises greater security assistance in service of development goals, but of course there are many ways to address insecurity beyond hard security assistance. Can this Council urge member states to set out how they will address the deeper social grievances that lead to violence? The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Action Plan for 2020-2024, for example, is a step in the right direction in seeking to address the root causes of insecurity, including through the promotion of good governance, but even here the prime objective is fighting terrorism, violent extremism and transnational organised crime. This focus is understandable, given the twin threat of jihadist violence in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin. But while states often give a nod to addressing the root causes of conflict, the full spectrum of insecurities leading to violence is often overlooked. Security sector assistance will not address insecurity linked to economic and governance challenges. As we have seen in several places, in particular the Sahel and Nigeria, where herder-farmer conflicts persist, these are factors that can cause some local populations to turn to extremist groups for income, basic services and protection.

Thirdly, this Council could encourage AU member states to discuss not just how much money they spend on security, but what they spend it on. Here, the focus could be on looking

at alternative ways to support security sectors by investing in institutions that address root causes of long-term security threats instead of seeking military quick fixes. This Council could urge member states to focus on prioritising efforts to professionalise and make security forces accountable and not just on financing costly military equipment. They could also urge external partners to put in place appropriate incentives and reward structures around training and equipping of African armies that are often understaffed and underequipped to deal with new threats on the continent.

A **fourth** related point is that AU member states and their international partners should ensure they are not throwing good money after bad and assess if more money for the same initiatives is really going to improve the security situation on the ground. Despite pouring money into military operations, some of Africa's governments and their international partners have struggled to secure lasting peace in the Lake Chad basin and the Sahel as well as Somalia. Ten years into the fight with Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin, the Islamist group has morphed into two factions, both of which are potent and deadly. As Crisis Group has said, to counter the threat while responding to the immediate and long-term needs of the population, Lake Chad basin countries need to build on the relatively successful Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) regional security cooperation, start to move away from their highly militarised response to include a more significant civilian component, elaborate a more coherent economic development plan and deal more effectively with former Boko Haram members. Here this Council could, for example, urge Lake Chad basin governments to take steps to enable the MNJTF to better support the AU's 2018 regional stabilisation strategy, which aims to improve services and create new livelihoods in conflict-affected areas.

A **fifth** point is that AU member states and their international partners need to better balance military response with a broader

comprehensive response to conflict. Worryingly, in recent years, international donors and African governments have often been too quick to look to security responses as a means of addressing instability, in particular in regions that face jihadist insurgencies. This has led them to focus on standing up ad hoc missions such as the G5 Sahel regional joint force at the expense of more comprehensive political strategies, prevention or mediation. As we have noted, in the Sahel, for example, while the official approach of the G5 Sahel governments and European donors to the conflict in the region is multidimensional – acknowledging the need for development, humanitarian aid and governance reform – they have given de facto priority to the military response. The G5 Sahel's Western backers have for several years focused more on making the G5 Sahel Joint Force operational than on prioritising the implementation of political strategies, promoting governance and community reconciliation, or carrying out development programs.

The prioritisation of military approaches has not changed conditions on the ground, raising concerns about a proposed AU plan to deploy 3,000 soldiers to the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where jihadist activity is most heavily concentrated. While there may be some merit in this planned deployment, will additional troops be enough to reverse the deterioration of security in a region already crowded with military operations that have so far brought no enduring peace? After seven years of military intervention, should our focus not shift to preventing and defusing the main drivers of violence through different non-military approaches?

Your excellencies, let me conclude by saying that the AU and in particular this Council can play a central role in shaping criteria that can help foster a conversation between international partners and AU member states on creating flexible mechanisms for debt relief or cancellation and prioritising investment in the security sector. But in the context of greater challenges related to COVID-19, it would be important to ensure a careful balancing of

financial support for security assistance with deeper social concerns about livelihood, governance and conflict prevention.

The AU could focus on developing an overall “sustainable security” strategy that links hard security to broader development and human security concerns. Understandably when there is a high security issue, the military needs to play a central role. But we need to bring back a semblance of politics and governance, which are critical parts of counter-insurgency. An ongoing concern is that national, regional and international responses can be lopsided toward

a military approach. The military may win battles but it cannot sustain wider security on its own. Whether in the Sahel, Somalia or the Lake Chad basin, states are struggling and are not going to win by military might alone.

And crucially, while member states need a capable and professional security sector, we also need to ensure that we do the hard longer-term work of prevention, including dialogue and development, which is often cheaper, too, than buying weapons.

Thank you.