



Security Council

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Letter dated 17 December 2015 from the Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa for 2015, as endorsed by the members of the Working Group.

I should be grateful if the present letter and the report would be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ismael Abraão **Gaspar Martins**

Chair

Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and
Resolution in Africa



Report on the activities of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2015

I. Introduction

1. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa is a subsidiary organ of the Security Council, established pursuant to the presidential statement of 31 January 2002 ([S/PRST/2002/2](#)), in which the Council recognized the need for adequate measures to prevent and resolve conflicts in Africa and indicated its intention to consider establishing a working group to monitor the recommendations contained in the above-mentioned presidential statement and to enhance coordination with the Economic and Social Council.
2. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Angola to the United Nations, Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins, was appointed Chair of the Working Group for a one-year period ending 31 December 2015 (see [S/2015/2/Rev.4](#)). The present report reflects the activities of the Working Group conducted in 2015.

II. Activities of the Working Group in 2015

3. On 19 February 2015, the Working Group met to consider its activities for 2015 as proposed by the Chair and, following discussion, agreed to the proposed programme of work. Also on 19 February, the Working Group began consideration of how it could assist the Security Council in preparing for the ninth annual joint consultative meeting of the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which was scheduled for 12 March.
4. On 6 March, the Working Group met to further discuss preparatory matters related to the joint consultative meeting. Given that the meeting would be hosted by the African Union in Addis Ababa, the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, Tété António, attended the meeting of the Working Group to brief the members on the status of preparations and provided elements of the draft joint communiqué of the joint consultative meeting. The final agreed text of the joint communiqué was transmitted to the President of the Security Council on 20 March (see [S/2015/212](#)).
5. On 30 April, the Working Group considered the topic “Cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations in the area of peacebuilding: lessons learned” and heard briefings by the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Olof Skoog (Sweden), the Permanent Observer of the African Union and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Oscar Fernández-Taranco. The Chairs of the country-specific configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission, concerned African States and the Chair of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture, Gert Rosenthal, also attended the meeting.
6. A fruitful discussion ensued, which allowed Working Group members to explore a range of relevant topics, such as enhancing discussion among the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the African Union offices on the ground on the nature and scope of peacebuilding challenges, the possible division of tasks, and the identification of practical frameworks to take the concerns of African

stakeholders into account in the planning and implementation of peacebuilding strategies. The Chair of the Commission pointed out that the regional dimension was of great importance for a number of countries on the Commission's agenda, and suggested that the United Nations system could better respond by increasing interaction among relevant United Nations country teams and a more systematic cooperation between the Commission and regional and subregional entities.

7. The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support noted that, in previous years, special attention had been paid to the security aspect in the context of the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, but the relationship had evolved and broad international collaboration was now necessary.

8. The representative of the African Union mentioned the recurring problems in African post-conflict countries, namely a relapse into violence and a lack of funding, and underlined the growing need for collaboration between the Peacebuilding Commission and the African Union to address the problems of development, maintain dialogue and conduct a common analysis of situations. Participants also discussed how best to bridge institutional gaps among the bodies concerned, some suggesting that the Working Group could be used as a forum in which the Security Council could draw further on the experience of the Peacebuilding Commission. More regular interaction between the African Union and the United Nations was called for by some participants, including in the sharing of information on early warning and in the joint mobilization of resources. Several participants shared useful insights on the importance of breaking the culture of "building silos" by showcasing the benefits of working together.

9. On 22 June 2015, the Working Group considered the topic "Prospects for mitigating pre- and post-electoral challenges in Africa: the role of the African Union and the United Nations" and heard briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily, the Deputy Director of the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, Tadjoudine Ali-Diabacté, and the Permanent Observer of the African Union. The Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Chairs of the country-specific configurations and the Permanent Representatives of African countries holding elections in 2015 and 2016 were invited to take part in the proceedings.

10. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa highlighted the busy electoral calendar in West Africa in 2015 and 2016, and divided the previous elections into two categories: those that had led to the consolidation of the institutions and to reconciliation, as in the case of Liberia, Mali and Nigeria, and those that had polarized society and degenerated into violence. He drew attention to the recent election held in Nigeria, where the United Nations had played a strong advocacy role to mitigate the potential for election-related violence, and which, in his opinion, should serve as best practice for the region and the continent. He also highlighted the crucial role that the United Nations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States had played in Burkina Faso following the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré on 31 October 2014, including the commitment of the three organizations to remaining involved through the transition and elections scheduled in 2015. Similarly, he suggested that the

European Union, the United Nations and the African Union coordinate their good offices efforts surrounding the national elections in Guinea in 2015, while he noted the role of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire in providing political support for the holding of the presidential elections in 2015 in that country, in particular by assisting the Ivorian authorities with ensuring a secure environment for the elections.

11. The Special Representative remarked that lessons from elections in West Africa had highlighted some important principles. First, he stated that democratic processes should be inclusive, transparent, accountable and designed to promote confidence. Second, he drew attention to the independence of national electoral commissions, and stressed that commissioners should be elected through a transparent process. It was important to engage national stakeholders on a regular basis and provide them with the information needed to participate fully. Third, close cooperation among political parties could be an important sign that they were committed to engaging peacefully and fairly on issues of national interest. Fourth, he drew attention to the role of civil society and domestic monitors, such as the creation of a platform of eminent personalities. The use of statistics-based election monitoring could give domestic observers a comprehensive view of the entire election process nationwide. Fifth, all political parties and candidates should be allowed equitable access to campaign through the media, including State-owned outlets. Finally, all branches of the security sector should be incorporated into a strategy that covered all parts of the country and all parts of the process, and the security services should remain neutral.

12. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa remarked that many countries holding elections in the Central African region were in post-conflict situations, which made those elections especially challenging. Unlike in West Africa, multiparty democracy had emerged in Central Africa, but was not yet present in a stable way, and the symptoms of conflict were still palpable. Some Central African States had less-developed private media, while there was a great deal of tension at the social level. At the economic level, he drew attention to the fall in oil prices, which were leading some States towards a period of economic crisis, which could impact social policies. Furthermore, the forthcoming elections in Central Africa would be held in a context where consensus solutions had not yet been reached on certain issues, such as constitutional term limits and the possibility of altering existing constitutions. Concerning circumstances for postponing elections, the Special Representative said that the question was whether elections would promote national reconciliation rather than exacerbate divisions. In Burundi, frank dialogue among the political parties was needed to find consensus, and he observed that rushing to elections without pursuing a reconciliation process, achieving an improved security environment and ensuring that displaced persons could vote contributed to undermining the electoral process.

13. The Deputy Director of the Electoral Assistance Division noted that the increasingly standard practice of rushing elections had at times exacerbated the overall political and security situation in some African countries. He recalled that the Panel of the Wise of the African Union had recommended that countries take steps to prepare and organize elections adequately. He underlined that electoral conflicts generally had systemic causes rooted in unsolved problems, such as exclusion, inequality or lack of trust in the institutions. The United Nations could

provide technical assistance in areas such as democratic governance, the promotion of inclusive electoral rules, the setting of appropriate calendars or the deployment of election observers.

14. The Permanent Observer of the African Union referred to legal instruments adopted by the African Union, including the Algiers Decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government of 2000. The Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit of the African Union was engaged in election observation, electoral assistance, electoral reform, training and capacity-building of electoral monitoring bureaux. The Panel of the Wise had prepared several reports on ways to prevent or resolve post-election crises and disputes. He highlighted the importance of prevention, ownership, better coordination between the United Nations and the African Union, the lack of funds of the African Union and the merit of using discreet diplomacy.

15. In the discussion that ensued, one participant agreed that elections were a gauge of the strength of political stability. In the Central African Republic, for example, elections would enable a return to constitutional order. Another participant welcomed the Security Council's increased attention to electoral contexts and said that the presence of the international community served to promote stability and mitigate tensions. The Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission suggested that any country holding elections with a fear of relapse into conflict could turn to the Commission for support, even for a single discussion or as an accompaniment. He added that the Commission could work more closely with the United Nations Development Programme and drew attention to the need for the flexible use of resources, including that of the Peacebuilding Fund. One participant stressed the need to incorporate regional and subregional perspectives into the work of the Commission and the Security Council, and underscored the importance of national ownership and the sovereignty of States, for instance in interpreting constitutions. Another participant attached importance to the role of youth in politics, a healthy civil society and the role of women in political processes, and also suggested that the Commission and the Security Council coordinate their messages, warning that significant authority could be lost if principles such as national ownership, inclusiveness and the role of the region and subregion were applied inconsistently.

16. On 14 September 2015, the Working Group considered the topic "Preventive diplomacy in Africa: the role of the African Union and its cooperation with the United Nations" and heard briefings by the Head of the African Union Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division, Fred Ngoga-Gateretse, and the Director of Political Affairs of the United Nations Office to the African Union, Abdel-Fatau Musah. The Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Permanent Observer of the African Union also participated in the meeting. The meeting was open to all States Members of the United Nations.

17. The Head of the African Union Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division highlighted several areas that could be addressed to enhance prevention. Pointing to the need for better early warning, he described how the African Union had been working with the United Nations and the regional economic communities to ensure that all those bodies attained the same situational awareness. Referring to some challenges to effective early warning, he remarked that, in some crises, the African Union and the regional economic communities had different readings of an unfolding situation, and he underscored that, while the concept of early warning was widely embraced, few actors actually wanted to be warned. He recommended

building stronger ties with civil society and regional partners to support effective conflict prevention.

18. He suggested that, in some cases, preventive diplomacy became a form of crisis management and that a form of earlier prevention could succeed when Member States agreed to assess their structural vulnerabilities. He pointed to the need to better equip what he termed “preventive diplomats” and, in that regard, noted that the African Union was expanding its pool of envoys, with a focus on identifying highly respected and capable senior envoys. He cautioned, however, that financial investment was needed to deliver results, especially in the area of rapid response capacity. He voiced the hope that an African Union mediation support unit would soon be established, but that would depend on the availability of adequate resources.

19. The Director of Political Affairs of the United Nations Office to the African Union observed that, upon its establishment in 2002, the African Union had moved from the non-interference approach of the Organization of African Unity to a non-indifference approach focused on shared responsibilities at the continental and regional levels. To avert conflict, the African Union had established legal norms and structures, including mitigating structures in the African peace and security architecture. It also utilized the good offices function of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and deployed special representatives and envoys, fact-finding missions and electoral observation missions. He described the process of the operationalization of the African governance architecture, a set of norms constituting a governance vision for the continent on the basis of legal instruments, including the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Lomé Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government and the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.

20. With a significant number of electoral processes being conducted in Africa in 2015 and 2016, he said that it was necessary to be prepared to support those who were vulnerable to potential conflict. The issue of term limits had brought tension, which the United Nations and the African Union had struggled to manage. Elections had caused clashes between the authorities and part of the public and had resulted in political grievances. While there were no easy answers, there were ways to better use the collective leverage. Noting that discussions on primacy and subsidiarity had led to an impasse, he suggested that horizon scanning and analysis towards a common situational understanding could be a means to harmonize collective action. He suggested that the United Nations and the African Union were still learning to navigate how to engage with different groups, militarily and politically, and that the complexities and new threats were beyond the capacity and expertise of any one organization. He said that the framework guiding the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union should be built upon early engagement, consultation, common understanding, joint planning and an integrated approach throughout the conflict cycle. The United Nations and the African Union were also promoting mutual capacity enhancement through more results-oriented preventive diplomacy and mediation processes.

21. The Permanent Observer of the African Union highlighted the role of the Panel of the Wise as one of the instruments of the African Union for engaging in

preventive diplomacy, which was cost-effective compared with expensive peacekeeping operations. Drawing attention to efforts at the national level, he underscored that a culture of peace should begin at home. He noted the change in conflict trends and the challenge that that could pose to preventive diplomacy, in particular for situations in which terrorism was involved.

22. The Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission pointed out that, in two of the recent major reviews, namely the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (A/70/95-S/2015/446) and the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (A/69/968-S/2015/490), it had been argued that improvements were needed both in working with regional organizations and in putting the preventive agenda into more concrete action. He observed that the African Union had gained tremendous experience, adding that the shift from non-interference to non-indifference had improved the prospects for early action. He said that the Commission was endeavouring to improve the preventive aspects of its work and had recently met on the subject of Burkina Faso. Although that country was not on the agenda of the Commission, it had sought consultation on some of the challenges that it could face ahead of the election. In reference to improving the cooperation of the Commission with regional organizations, he mentioned the possibility of visiting the African Union.

23. In the discussion that ensued, participants expressed support for a strengthened partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, with several members of the Working Group noting that the joint efforts in addressing the situation in Burkina Faso had been decisive in ensuring that the armed forces had respected the rule of law. One member advocated a deepened strategic partnership, as had been recommended by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, and suggested that coordinated approaches should begin as crises were emerging and include more joint assessment, joint briefings and analysis. Another member said that constructive dialogue between the Security Council and the African Union should be strengthened, with a focus on seeking comparative advantages and complementarity. That same member lamented the lack of investment made in prevention, suggesting that the examples of the strategic cooperation that had been achieved in the area of peacekeeping should also be pursued in the area of prevention.

24. One member remarked that the Working Group had advocated more visiting missions of the Security Council as a part of its conflict prevention role. Another recalled that the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council, in their most recent joint communiqué, had agreed to undertake a joint mission in 2015. Acknowledging that any such joint mission should serve to support regional efforts rather than “muddy the waters”, the importance of coordinating closely with the African Union and the regional economic communities was underscored. One member said that the joint consultative meetings between the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council had a tendency to be too formal and should be focused more on producing programmes for action for resolving conflicts rather than simply discussing them. That member was of the view that joint missions of the two bodies should be undertaken to complement the joint consultative meetings.

25. One member welcomed the increased activity by African institutions in the area of conflict prevention, noting that African knowledge and the African “toolbox” were often more appropriate for dealing with local situations. Citing the

case of Libya, several members said that insufficient attention had been given to the African initiative for a peaceful settlement of the crisis in 2011. They stressed that national ownership of electoral processes should be respected, given that foreign interference could worsen the situation. Another member drew attention to the concept of non-interference and contrasted it with the concept of non-indifference, adding that the international community could not be indifferent when faced with atrocities that rose to the level of crimes against humanity and genocide, wherever they might take place. For that member, the responsibility to protect had to be taken into account when applying preventive diplomacy in such cases.

26. One participant recalled that resolution 1625 (2005) had provided a foundation for a systemic approach to conflict prevention in Africa. At that time, the focus had been on mediation. Noting that conflict could be detected further upstream, he suggested that prevention did not have to be a last-minute solution. He added that, whenever there was a sign of a conflict, the United Nations should address it in a phased approach. Progress had been made on that front, in particular in resolution 2171 (2014), which complemented resolution 1625 (2005). He advocated more regional offices to bring understanding of the political realities and ensure that the United Nations had an informed opinion.

27. Several members and other participants observed that the United Nations should concentrate on sustainable development as a way to help to ensure that conflict could be prevented. One participant recalled that some activities preceded preventive diplomacy, such as good governance, human rights, the rule of law and the reinforcement of cooperation and international development. Referring to the recommendation of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture that \$100 million should be provided to the Peacebuilding Fund (see [A/69/968-S/2015/490](#), para. 171), one participant said that such an investment could put the United Nations in a better position to save human lives, as well as money.

III. Conclusions

28. The Chair of the Working Group recalled that, in paragraph 18 of its resolution 2033 (2012), the Security Council had decided to follow up on the communiqués of the annual consultative meetings of the Security Council and of the Peace and Security Council, including through the Working Group. The Working Group should thus continue to exercise that mandate. The tenth annual joint consultative meeting, scheduled to be held in New York in 2016, could provide a timely and appropriate occasion to discuss how to follow up on the communiqués agreed upon by the members of both bodies.

29. Furthermore, it appeared that the evolution and strengthening of the African peace and security architecture and the growing partnership between the United Nations and the African Union offered opportunities for the Working Group to reinvigorate its work programme by serving as an expert body that could advise the Security Council on the basis of information and analysis that it received from United Nations and African Union sources on specific issues on the Council's agenda, including in the areas of early warning and prevention.

30. The Chair noted that the Working Group meetings held in 2015 had yielded potentially useful ideas regarding the relationship between the Security Council and

the African Union, which could enhance the work of the Council, including in the areas of peacebuilding, mitigating pre-electoral and post-electoral challenges and preventive diplomacy. In that connection, the Chair recommended that the Council should keep under review the ideas and suggestions that had emerged from the meetings of the Working Group in 2015 and to consider those ideas and suggestions that could be incorporated into the work of the Council, in particular with regard to its country-specific and substantive work.
