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Peace & Security Council Report

Mali's military takeover puts popular protests in the spotlight

> President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta announced his resignation on Mali's national television on Tuesday night, 18 August. Earlier that day he was detained by the army, along with his prime minister Boubou Cissé. Rumours of a mutiny that morning morphed into Keïta's resignation under duress, which amounted to a military takeover. The self-proclaimed National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) is currently holding power.

This followed weeks of demonstrations and heightened tensions over contested legislative elections against the backdrop of corruption scandals linked to military procurement and poor governance. Mali has been facing multiple crises in the form of violent extremism, local conflicts and transnational organised crime in the north and centre, which are spreading to other parts of the country.

The African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations and wider international community condemned the removal of Keïta by the army. The Peace and Security Council suspended Mali from the AU until constitutional order is restored. The council also called for Keïta and other detained officials to be freed. ECOWAS suspended Mali, closed borders, imposed sanctions on the CNSP leaders and ordered them to reinstate the deposed Keïta.

Questions about governance

The Malian case raises questions about popular protests, military takeovers and governance in Africa, where there's been an increase in popular uprisings in the past decade or so. The height of these were the Arab Spring events, followed by those in Burkina Faso in 2014 that brought down former president Blaise Compaoré.

> Mali has been facing multiple crises in the form of violent extremism, local conflicts and transnational organised crime

Last year was another reminder of how regimes can be changed through street demonstrations and military intervention. Months of sustained uprisings in Algeria and Sudan led to the removal of 30-year incumbents Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Omar al-Bashir.

Africa has made progress in reducing the occurrence of coup d'états, particularly with its rejection of unconstitutional changes of government

Current PSC Chairperson

The PSC was on recess during the month of August 2020. **HE Mohamed Idriss**, ambassador of Djibouti to the AU chaired the emergency meeting on Mali held on 19 August.

PSC members

Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal

as enshrined in the AU's African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. ECOWAS has a similar framework in its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Neither charter however specifically deals with uprising situations like those that sparked military takeovers in Algeria, Sudan and now Mali.

When does a protest qualify as popular?

There are essentially two key issues with popular protests. First is the disagreement around when a protest qualifies as popular, or popular enough to justify a call for a change of government. Second is the seemingly unconstitutional nature of a request, even by people with apparently legitimate grievances, for an elected president or his government to step down without following constitutional due process.

The argument that elected leaders can be removed only through elections and never through the streets or by a military takeover can only stand when they're elected through credible polls, and when they themselves uphold the rule of law as part of a constitutional social contract.

Beyond Mali, the trend has also been for African leaders to amend or circumvent constitutions to extend their stay in power

Keïta may have been re-elected in 2018 in elections considered credible by most, but he faced massive public demonstrations as early as April 2019. Recent protests were sparked by contestation over the April 2020 parliamentary election results. Ordinary Malians voiced their discontent with the rampant poverty, insecurity, bad governance and corruption.

Beyond Mali, the trend has also been for African leaders to amend or circumvent constitutions to extend their stay in power. This, like coups, protests and military takeovers, creates institutional instability not conducive to entrenching democratic norms and practices. Others may then regard constitutional order as malleable.

The AU's charter and ECOWAS's protocol both reject unconstitutional changes of government but they also clearly outline democratic and good governance norms, and the latter should minimise the risk for the former to occur.

The question of how legitimate, representative or popular a protest is may not always be possible to answer. But when grievances are legitimate and supported by a significant proportion of the population, it's difficult to dispute the 'popularity' of an uprising, or stop it. This isn't to say that unseating a president or government through uprisings should be the norm, but when citizens regard a government to have failed, they will take to the streets and may demand that it resigns.

2018
PRESIDENT
IBRAHIM BOUBACAR KEÏTA
RE-ELECTED

Legitimate demands

These demands can be regarded as legitimate where elections haven't historically been free, fair and transparent, and therefore where leaders cannot be removed through the ballot. This typically signals a lack of trust in state institutions, in their independence and impartiality, which discredits democratic processes.

If the legitimacy, popularity or representativeness of a protest can be questioned, so too can that of a sitting government. When leaders are 'elected' in dubious polls where results are highly contested, they don't have much legitimacy.

In Mali, as with many other African countries, elections are contentious and results are systematically disputed. In the March/April 2020 legislative elections a constitutional court ruling for the polls' final results allocated 30 seats mostly to the ruling party and its allies, causing countrywide demonstrations.

Also, the elections were set for 2018 but were delayed partly to pass a constitutional amendment to kick-start the process of decentralisation, as agreed on in the Algiers 2015 peace accord.

> Current trends suggest that popular protests will become even more regular in Africa's contested socio-political space

The military takeover occurred after mediation led by former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan and an ECOWAS mission of heads of state failed to break the deadlock between Keïta and the *Mouvement du 5 Juin – Rassemblement des Forces Républicaines* (M5-RFP) coalition that led the anti-government demonstrations.

Current trends suggest that popular protests will become even more regular in Africa's contested socio-political space. With projections that COVID-19 will aggravate levels of poverty and unemployment, governments appearing to be underperforming while corruption remains rife will continue experiencing uprisings.

Popular protests are a symptom of deeper governance deficits. Part of the solution lies in a holistic rather than selective application of African norms on democracy and good governance, which cannot solely rebuke unconstitutional changes of government while allowing other violations and excesses to flourish.

Mali has entered a period of political uncertainty. The transition arrangements must be carefully negotiated to preserve some stability in the frail security apparatus that's been fighting violent extremism. The success of this current transition will determine Mali's future as a country.

March and April 2020

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN MALI

Côte d'Ivoire and the 'third-term' virus

The events that unfolded in Côte d'Ivoire in early August 2020, marked by protests, violence and death, are reminiscent of the country's darkest hours, particularly the 2000 and 2010/2011 post-election crises. Developments over the past couple of months point to a likely rise in tensions around the presidential elections, scheduled to take place on 31 October 2020.

Regional bodies such as the AU should try to prevent the reoccurrence of such incidents by taking earlier action against opportunistic constitutional amendments or interpretations aimed at prolonging presidential mandates.

The first protest erupted in response to former president Laurent Gbagbo's name being removed from the voter's roll. A group of young people, supporters of Gbagbo's Popular Ivorian Front (*Front Populaire Ivoirien* [FPI]) staged a demonstration in front of the offices of the electoral commission.

More protests took place in Abidjan and other parts of the country against current President Alassane Ouattara's decision to run for a controversial third term. The ruling party has justified Ouattara's bid on the basis that the constitutional amendment of November 2016 gives him a clean slate under the new republic. Critics, however, see this as a slippery slope and have called for regional bodies to reject such arguments.

Ouattara's about-turn

In a much-anticipated moment, on 5 March 2020, Ouattara (78) announced that he would not run for a third term and had decided 'to transfer power to a young generation'.

The ruling Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (*Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix* [RHDP]) nominated Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly as its candidate. The ailing Gon Coulibaly, however, died on 8 July 2020. Left without a candidate, RHDP cadres almost unanimously called for Ouattara to stand for a third term.

'Confronted with this case of force majeure and as a duty-bound citizen, I have decided to favourably respond to my compatriots' call for me to stand as candidate for the 31 October presidential elections. I am therefore a candidate for the 31 October 2020 presidential election,' Ouattara tweeted on 6 August 2020.

The RHDP is adamant that Ouattara's candidacy will preserve peace and stability in the country.

Although the constitution sets a two-term limit for the president, the RHDP claims that Ouattara is allowed to run for a third term under the new constitution, passed on 8 November 2016. It argues that Ouattara's second term began under the Second Republic, governed by the 2000 constitution, whereas this new term would be under the Third Republic, as per the November 2016 constitution. By that logic, Ouattara could remain in power until 2030.

> Regional bodies should take earlier action against opportunistic constitutional amendments or interpretations

The opposition, however, has dismissed the 'Third Republic' argument as spurious. It argues that a third term for Ouattara is unconstitutional and would in any case go against the letter and spirit of the constitution, as well as the democratic principle of change in power.

Others contend that the death of Gon Coulibaly does not constitute a case of force majeure and the RHDP is simply using this as an excuse to justify Ouattara's candidacy.

Resetting the clock

Ouattara is not the first African head of state to seek a controversial third term. Far from it. Many before him have amended their constitutions with the sole aim of removing a constitutional prohibition on a third term. Some have succeeded, while others such as former Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaoré have failed and so lost power.

More recently, Guinea's President Alpha Condé (82), in a contentious political climate marked by protests and

violence, held a referendum amending the constitution to allow him to run for a third term. Condé was nominated by the ruling Rally of the Guinean People (*Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée* [RPG]) as its candidate for the 18 October 2020 presidential election, ironically on the same day as his neighbour Ouattara.

The parallel seems uncanny, because Condé's supporters rely on exactly the same argument as those of Ouattara, claiming that the new constitution resets the counter for presidential terms to zero.

In slightly different circumstances, former Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza had used a very similar argument to legalise and legitimise his candidacy for the 2015 presidential election in Burundi.

The virus of 'a third term at all costs' poses a serious risk to the entrenchment and consolidation of democratic norms and practices in Africa. This is especially the case when heads of state use subterfuge to torpedo or interpret constitutions contrary to the principle of (peaceful) change of power.

The ultimate and deplorable risk is instability and the institutional tango that results from the confiscation of power by those who refuse to vacate their office.

At an Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) heads of state meeting on the military takeover in Mali, Guinea Bissau's president Umaro Sissoco Embalò reportedly stated that while the military coup in Mali must be condemned, third terms should also be deemed coups d'états and be rejected.

Political manoeuvrings

The RHDP's choice for Ouattara as replacement for Gon Coulibaly can be explained in great part by the fact that another political heavyweight, former president Henri Konan Bédié (86), was officially nominated on 26 July as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (*Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* [PDCI]).

The RHDP, it seems, feels that only Ouattara has the stature to compete against Bédié or another candidate that a coalition of opposition parties could support in a possible second round.

In a recent interview, Bédié said that the main opposition had made an electoral deal that would see them backing a single candidate in a second round against the RHDP, should that scenario play out.

This agreement includes Bédié's PDCI and Gbagbo's FPI, as well as movements led by former prime minister and speaker of the national assembly Guillaume Soro and former minister and youth leader Charles Blé Goudé.

Gbagbo and Blé Goudé have both been acquitted of crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court, where they were held for eight and six years, respectively. The restrictions placed on their movements were also lifted. Both have expressed their intention to return to Côte d'Ivoire and have applied for Ivorian passports in order to travel home; the government has stated that it is reviewing the applications.

> Condé's supporters claim that the new constitution resets the counter for presidential terms to zero

Former first lady Simone Gbagbo has urged Ouattara to allow Gbagbo to return home and warned that keeping him away from his native land would not further peace and reconciliation in the country.

Meanwhile, Gbagbo, Blé Goudé and Soro have each been sentenced by Ivorian courts to 20 years in prison for various crimes. As a result, Gbagbo and Soro have been removed from the voter's roll, with the obvious implication that they cannot contest the October 2020 presidential polls. None of this bodes well for the country's peace and stability going into the elections.

All stakeholders must play their part

The Ivorian political class must come to genuine agreement on certain rules and, in addition, commit to respecting them for the preservation of peace in the country. They must also work toward true reconciliation and build a country where future generations will not inherit the evil of a fractured society.

Finally, regional bodies such as ECOWAS and continental entities such as the AU should work harder to ensure that constitutions are not tampered with to the detriment of the consolidation of democratic institutions. If unconstitutional changes of government are rejected, so too should opportunistic constitutional amendments or interpretations.

The AU's role beyond the GERD negotiations

The dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is the latest and most intense diplomatic confrontation over the use of the Nile River.

The construction of the GERD, officially announced in 2011, is not the first such dispute, nor will it be the last. As climate change and rising populations in riparian countries place more demands on the Nile, countries will have to develop the river to respond to these needs. This means there is a high probability that more disputes will be sparked between upstream and downstream states.

The current AU-brokered negotiations on the GERD have seen important achievements, and are expected to lead to a binding agreement on the filling and operation of the dam. However, if the AU is to successfully prevent future conflicts over the use of the Nile, it will have to help riparian countries reach a comprehensive basin-wide agreement on its management and equitable use.

The AU will also have to overcome legal and capacity issues. While its Peace and Security Council (PSC) in March 2019 expanded the domain of the blue economy to include inland water bodies such as rivers, dams and lakes, it is yet to formulate a strategy on how to help member states resolve disputes over the use of transboundary watercourses.

This shortcoming may be resolved by expanding the AU's border governance strategy to include the management and use of transboundary water bodies, as well as relevant conflict resolution mechanisms.

AU's role as mediator

The AU's involvement in the GERD dispute was precipitated by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's bold move to engage the AU as the facilitator of the talks in the spirit of finding 'African solutions to Africa's problems'. According to Ambassador Xolisa Makaya, South Africa's Permanent Representative to the AU, having learnt of the May and June 2020 letters on the GERD which were addressed to the United Nations Security Council by Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, the Chair of the Union, President Cyril Ramaphosa decided to intervene and consulted with the Heads of State and Government of the three countries (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan).

This initial consultation was followed by the first extraordinary virtual summit of the Bureau of the Assembly, in the presence of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. The summit helped to determine the AU's role in the GERD negotiations and appointed four observers from the Bureau countries to take part in the Tripartite Negotiation Committee, previously established by the three countries.

The Bureau also assigned four African technical experts to help the parties reach a negotiated settlement on outstanding issues. The European Union and United States (US) were invited to the negotiations as observers.

> The AU-brokered negotiations have seen important achievements, and are expected to lead to a binding agreement

The AU experts presented their report with options for resolving outstanding legal and technical issues to the Bureau and the three negotiating countries during another extraordinary summit held on 21 July. The Bureau urged the negotiating parties to expedite the finalisation of a 'binding Agreement on the Filling and Operation of the GERD' and welcomed their willingness to reach a comprehensive agreement on the Blue Nile as soon as possible.

The latest round of negotiations resumed on 18 August, when the three countries compiled their positions in one document, expected to be the basis for an agreement.

Achievements of the AU-led process

While the AU-led negotiations are ongoing, its involvement has seen tangible results.

The AU's engagement at the Bureau-level is a break with its tradition of trying to resolve the issue through behind-the-scenes quiet diplomacy. This has helped the three parties to resume and commit to negotiations. They will be careful not to alienate African support in the issue by withdrawing from an AU-led process.

The AU's involvement has further helped to de-escalate tensions that had reached an all-time high when the GERD became highly politicised following the fallout from the US-brokered negotiations in February.

The AU's involvement has also halted a regional axis formation and eased the pressure on regional states to choose sides. Its engagement likewise helped to stem great power politics, particularly between the US and Russia.

Issues of divergence

According to the chairperson of the AUC, Moussa Faki Mahamat, 'more than 90% of the issues in the Tripartite Negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan have already been resolved'.

The outstanding legal and technical issues include the dispute resolution mechanism, long-term operation of the dam, future development on the Blue Nile and the nature of the agreement to be signed.

Egypt and Sudan would like Ethiopia to guarantee a minimum outflow of water from the GERD's reservoir based on historical average discharge. This involves compensating for any shortfall in water flow caused by drought or future upstream use. Egypt and Sudan also want the three countries to sign a binding agreement

that will allow them to seek external arbitration if disputes arise during the operation of the dam.

Ethiopia argues that Egypt and Sudan's terms are more or less a request for the natural flow of the Blue Nile. This is untenable, in Ethiopia's view, as it compromises the ability of the GERD to operate at full capacity, and infringes upon its rights to use the Nile waters and undertake future developments on the Blue Nile.

> The AU's engagement at the Bureau-level is a break with its tradition of behind-the-scenes quiet diplomacy

Ethiopia also insists on resorting to the dispute resolution mechanism agreed upon by the three countries in the Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (DoP) signed in 2015 by Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. The declaration stipulates that 'the three states will settle their conflicts emerging from the interpretation or implementation of this accord by consensus through consultations and negotiations'.

Another major issue that has hobbled the negotiations is the impact that any agreement might have on the future use of the Blue Nile by Ethiopia. While declaring its

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A troubled history

Successive Ethiopian governments have opposed Egyptian development plans on the Nile, including the construction of the Aswan High Dam (completed in 1971), the diversion of the Nile River into northern Sinai through the El-Salaam Canal across the Red Sea, and the construction of the Toshka Canal in the south-west of the country for irrigation purposes.

Similarly, Egypt has consistently objected to Ethiopia's construction of hydroelectric dams on the Nile.

The various agreements signed thus far on the management and use of the Nile have not included all the riparian countries.

- In 1929 Egypt and Britain signed the Nile Waters Agreement, which recognised Egypt's 'historic' rights to the Nile and gave it the right to veto any development projects in other riparian countries.

- In 1959 an agreement between Egypt and Sudan gave Egypt 66% and Sudan 22% of the rights to the Nile waters (the remaining 12% is lost to evaporation). Upstream countries, most notably Ethiopia, rejected these agreements.

- In 1999 Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan (joining after independence), Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda formed the Nile Basin Initiative. This was followed by the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA). After more than a decade-long negotiation process on the management and allocation of the Nile waters, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda ratified the CFA, while Burundi and Kenya signed it. Egypt and Sudan, however, rejected it and therefore are not bound by it.

willingness to reach a win–win outcome in negotiations on the GERD, Ethiopia insists on having a comprehensive water treaty governing the equitable use of the Nile as a mechanism to avoid future tensions in the Basin.

Preventing future disputes over the Nile

The management and development of the Nile River has been a point of contention among riparian countries, especially Ethiopia and Egypt, for more than a century.

Currently, despite the GERD's having been endorsed by both Sudan and Egypt through the Declaration of Principles signed in 2015, it continues to create tensions between the three countries. This shows that while the current AU-led negotiations might result in an agreement on the GERD, such an agreement may not prevent potential disputes among riparian countries as they seek to develop the river.

Ethiopia has already announced plans to build more dams along the Nile. Uganda, another riparian country, is also discussing plans to build a dam between lakes Kyoga and Albert that has the potential to increase Uganda's hydro-electrical power generation capacity by 40%.

This poses a challenge in terms of ensuring equitable use of the Nile by all riparian countries without causing significant harm to downstream countries as per international law principles, and so guaranteeing sustainable peace.

Rapid population growth in the riparian countries and climate change will place growing demands on the Nile.

The AU will thus have to be forward-looking and try to help riparian countries reach an inclusive basin-wide agreement that will prevent any conflict that might arise from the future use and development of the Nile.

Need for a legal framework

The current AU-led negotiations have, however, highlighted a number of challenges facing the organisation. It lacks a legal framework on the management and use of transboundary watercourses. Without such a framework to guide the mediation process, the current negotiations are based on the positions held by each country.

Furthermore, the AU Bureau's recommendation of a comprehensive agreement is limited to the Blue Nile, while not all Blue Nile riparian countries are represented at the negotiations.

The AU also lacks institutional capacity to resolve disputes over transboundary waters. It had to establish an ad-hoc committee of external experts for the current negotiations on the GERD. Sources close to the negotiations indicated that finding African experts had been challenging, as there are not many African hydrologists and international water law experts.

These gaps have to be addressed if the AU is to continue playing an instrumental role in the prevention and resolution of disputes over transboundary watercourses.

THE NILE RIVER BASIN

Why is SADC slow to intervene in political crises?

In the run-up to their 40th annual summit on 17 August 2020, the leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) faced a barrage of criticism from citizens over their inaction in response to the region's problems.

Civil society groups, opposition leaders and commentators are asking why SADC is for the most part silent on crises such as those in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

South Africa's influential former public protector Thuli Madonsela, for example, asked why SADC was not intervening in Zimbabwe to defuse the conflict in the same way that ECOWAS was in West Africa. 'If this was ECOWAS, there would long ago have been a meeting with President [Emmerson] Mnangagwa to ask him to explain what is going on,' Madonsela said in an interview.

ECOWAS heads of state are currently trying to resolve the political crisis in Mali and have often in the past intervened at a high level in places such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia.

Meanwhile, in SADC, almost three years after a devastating insurgency started in northern Mozambique, there are also increasing calls for the regional organisation to act decisively and transparently.

In the DRC, opposition politicians are asking why there has not been a delegation of SADC leaders to mediate in the serious political crisis in that country in the same way ECOWAS is doing in Mali. SADC should be held responsible for the political tension in that country after it intervened to legitimise a flawed election, according to the opposition.

In Malawi, where President Lazarus Chakwera won a rerun of the 2019 elections, which were considered flawed by the country's own courts, people have little faith in SADC. This is after the organisation rubber-stamped last year's polls as peaceful and transparent.

SADC is not ECOWAS

SADC, however, is very different from ECOWAS – historically, institutionally and politically.

When commentators in the region criticise SADC, the solidarity between former liberation movements is usually mentioned as the main obstacle in any meaningful engagement to intervene on behalf of citizens of these countries.

This is certainly true in many instances. Ruling parties such as the ANC in South Africa, ZANU PF in Zimbabwe, Frelimo in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia and the MPLA in Angola tend to shield one another from interference or criticism. This well-known 'brotherhood' – as African heads of state like to describe it – allows some regimes to get away with murder.

This is also where SADC differs from ECOWAS, where the memories of the struggle against colonialism are not as fresh in everyone's minds as in Southern Africa. Here the links between former liberation movements remain strong.

However, SADC is also hamstrung by a number of institutional obstacles. Going forward, institutional reforms could give it a greater political role.

> The solidarity between former liberation movements is usually the main obstacle in any meaningful engagement

Firstly, it has a fairly weak secretariat, with very few decision-making powers compared to the ECOWAS Commission. The latter has a bigger budget and arguably more capacity than SADC to carry out its programmes independently of member states. Member states have not considered it in their interests to strengthen the SADC Secretariat.

The SADC Secretariat and its executive secretary also rarely speak out on controversial issues. This is left to member states. Yet member states only meet once a year and if the chair of the organisation is not engaged in issues – or too implicated, which might be the case with Mozambique, the new SADC chair for 2020/2021 – nothing happens.

It has to be said that ECOWAS is not faultless in this regard – whether it communicates effectively depends on the personality and strength of the chairperson of the ECOWAS Commission.

Inadequate conflict-prevention mechanisms

Secondly, when it comes to intervening in crises, SADC is hamstrung by a complicated system that dates back to a time before South Africa joined the then Southern African Development Coordination Conference in 1992.

Any political issues are handled by the troika of the Organ on Defence, Politics and Security, which in the past year has been led by Mnangagwa. This is distinct from the troika of current, previous and upcoming chairs of SADC.

This rotating so-called 'double troika' system might be more inclusive – with six heads of state serving in leadership positions at any given time – but it is often misunderstood by the general public and creates confusion. Some in SADC have called for reforms to the double troika system.

These rotating positions are also rarely occupied by the leaders of smaller and newcomer states such as Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles or the Comoros.

Following the August 17 summit, SADC will be headed by Mozambique's Filipe Nyusi and Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi will lead the organ.

Lack of trust in SADC by ordinary citizens

Thirdly, the fact that SADC does not have institutions that properly represent citizens is a huge obstacle to decisive action and buy-in from ordinary people in the region. For example, citizens in SADC cannot turn to a tribunal when they feel wronged by their own governments, as citizens in West Africa can turn to the ECOWAS Court of Justice. The SADC tribunal was dissolved in 2012 following pressure from Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe.

It is crucial to re-instate the tribunal with full powers to hear complaints from SADC citizens.

SADC also does not have a regional parliament. It only has a Parliamentary Forum with no legislative powers. Frequent requests have been made to upgrade the forum to a fully-fledged parliament, but this has still not happened. Such a move could improve the relationship between people and the regional organisation.

However, as seen with the pan-African parliament, such a body would need to be properly representative of the entire political landscape and have a high profile in order to play a meaningful role.

Generally, ECOWAS also has stronger links with non-governmental organisations and civil society than SADC does.

SADC observer missions

Fourthly, the structure of election observation missions, which are often made up of government officials with little civil society participation, has in the past undermined the credibility of these missions. This is often the only time citizens actually see SADC at work in their own countries – when vehicles with the SADC logo and officials with flap jackets do the rounds at election time.

Incidents such as those in Malawi last year and the many controversial statements by SADC on elections in Zimbabwe have not ingratiated SADC with the people of those countries, or the opposition. On this score, ECOWAS and other regional economic communities are not without fault either, having over the years rubber-stamped many elections that were considered deeply compromised.

Finally, the fact that many resolutions are adopted and not implemented also undermines people's faith in SADC. For example, in ECOWAS, a citizen of a member state can travel fairly freely with an ECOWAS passport across the 15 member states of the organisation – barring harassment by corrupt officials at borders.

For most SADC citizens, especially those from outlier countries such as Madagascar, there is no such luxury. While free movement across borders might be possible for some, working and living in another member state owing to your regional status is still a pipe dream.

SADC has over the years claimed important milestones in improving regional integration and ensuring greater synergy between policies in member states – from gender representation in politics to infrastructure and border management. It has also attempted to coordinate responses to COVID-19 by ensuring freight transport can move across the region.

People living in conflict-ridden countries and those experiencing bad governance, however, will continue to hope for reforms that facilitate greater intervention and a principled stance by SADC.

PSC interview: Maintaining multilateralism in a world hit by COVID-19

Like many organisations around the world, La Francophonie has been forced to change its working methods because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The *PSC Report* asked Ambassador Boubacar Issa Abdourhamane, permanent representative of the Francophonie to the AU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, about his organisation's strategy for the continent going forward.

What role does the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) play in responding to peace and security challenges in Africa, particularly in its African member states?

Thank you for your interest in the OIF, which, as you know, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The OIF currently consists of 88 states. Its work covers a wide range of issues. In the early 1970s its role was to develop technical and cultural cooperation, prioritising the education sector around the shared French language. Then member states extended its powers to economic issues and questions of democracy, peace and security.

Consequently, La Francophonie is shaped by its member states in line with the evolution of our constantly changing world and in the search for solutions to our common challenges. In the area of peace and security, two instruments are the basis of its actions: the Bamako Declaration adopted in 2000 and the Saint-Boniface Declaration on human security and conflict prevention adopted in 2006. Today, nothing sustainable can be achieved without peace and security.

However, ensuring peace and security is first and foremost the primary responsibility of states; La Francophonie only supports their efforts, in coordination with regional and international organisations. It is involved in many efforts in the field of prevention and peaceful resolution of crises and conflicts. Mediators and special envoys are often deployed in countries by the secretary general, as the need arises.

What role does the Addis Ababa delegation of the OIF play?

Here in Addis Ababa, our delegation has existed for 20 years and its role at the African level is one of strengthening relations between La Francophonie, the AU and the ECA in a range of areas. With the AU,

cooperation covers many subjects, such as questions of peace and security, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, multilingualism and participation in international consultations. There are regular consultations at the highest level between the chairperson of the AU Commission and the secretary general of La Francophonie. We also have the Group of Francophone Ambassadors in Addis Ababa, which plays an important role in mobilising and promoting the values of La Francophonie, in particular respect for multilingualism in consultations and exchanges.

It is also important to mention training activities for capacity building in several areas, in collaboration and with the support of the French embassy, in particular French courses and technical training with the training department of the AU. We are very happy with the quality of the collaboration with the AU and the ECA.

How has the OIF's work been affected by COVID-19?

La Francophonie, like all organisations around the world, has been affected by COVID-19 in its day-to-day work. Very quickly, the secretary general of La Francophonie, Louise Mushikiwabo, developed initiatives implemented by the administrator, Catherine Cano. Decisions regarding the protection of staff, ensuring the continuity of operations at headquarters and in external units, were taken quickly.

Our secretary general, in consultation with international partners, also initiated an important campaign in favour of member countries, particularly in Africa, for debt relief measures by various creditors in order to allow states to focus their resources on COVID-19 responses and essential services such as health and education. It has also developed initiatives to share online educational resources in French for the benefit

of schools, to allow children and young people to continue learning despite the closure of schools.

La Francophonie also recently set up a Francophonie Fund for women: '*La Francophonie avec Elles*'. This is an initiative by the secretary general to support women in precarious situations in the French-speaking world who are feeling the full force of the socioeconomic impacts of crises like the one we are currently experiencing. In order to measure the impact of this crisis on growth and employment in the French-speaking world, the OIF has set up an economic data gathering system, which is a tool to inform and support decision-making and cooperation.

Finally, La Francophonie is developing an important initiative to fight against disinformation, which has become a huge issue during the health crisis. Support and webinars on fact-checking and inbox control tools have been put in place. The OIF also contributes to the COVID-19 Solidarity platform, which has enabled the widespread mobilisation of innovators and the fruitful sharing of innovative solutions, some of which are supported for development on a larger scale.

What do you think states and the continent should do to recover from the impact of COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a serious pandemic. It has made our world in many places a sad one, filled with grieving families. Numerous measures to stop the pandemic, to find an effective vaccine and imagine solutions to the social and economic consequences are being explored. This is thanks to the international cooperation and coordination mechanisms put in place as a response to the pandemic, led by the WHO [World Health Organization] and other organisations.

> La Francophonie is developing an important initiative to fight against disinformation, which has become a huge issue

The pandemic also reminds us of the importance of preserving an effective multilateral system that meets the needs of populations and the need for global consensus on issues that affect the future of our common humanity. As part of its cooperation with the AU, La Francophonie supports the awareness campaign with African artists that was launched on 25 May – Africa Day – in collaboration with the Africa CDC [Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention] and the AU Department of Social Affairs.

The OIF's stated aims include the promotion of democracy and human rights. What are the challenges African member states are facing in upholding electoral democracy and human rights during COVID-19, and how can some of these challenges be addressed?

The COVID pandemic does pose a challenge to the functioning of democratic systems, which at regular intervals must elect leaders in accordance with

25 May
2020

THE LAUNCH OF
AN AWARENESS
CAMPAIGN TOGETHER
WITH AFRICAN ARTISTS

constitutional provisions. Electoral participation involves gatherings, logistical organisation, mobilisation and travel for campaigns and voting. The anti-COVID-19 measures taken such as social distancing to avoid the spread of the pandemic, though important for protecting populations, can sometimes restrict these dynamics and this is a new challenge that we must learn to deal with.

It is also a challenge owing to the cost of the additional resources needed, such as masks, to hold elections during the pandemic. So far, elections have been held during the COVID period with protective measures in place. Several elections are planned in the coming months and La Francophonie could provide, at the request of states, its expertise and support, particularly in the field of voter's rolls and the strengthening of consensus in line with our aims of promoting transparent and peaceful elections.

What are the major peace and security challenges facing Mali, and how do you think regional organisations and partners such as the OIF and AU could support the country?

All the countries of the Sahel are members of La Francophonie and it is therefore very aware of the political and security situation in the region. It is a region that faces many structural and environmental challenges. Over the past 10 years it has seen the development of violent extremism with the proliferation of armed terrorist groups that threaten the peace and security of populations and economic development in these states.

Secretary General Louise Mushikiwabo was at the Nouakchott Summit in July alongside the five Sahelian heads of state, the chairperson of the AU Commission and the French president. She provided support to the member states of this region. La Francophonie also works closely with the G5 Sahel Secretariat.

Regarding recent events in Mali, La Francophonie suspended Mali and reaffirmed its solidarity with the Malian people. However, it maintains its cooperation directly benefiting the civilian population, as well as those contributing to the restoration of democracy. The secretary general also announced that a high level delegation would visit Bamako to assess the situation.

As you know, in the Sahel region, these tend to be complex problems and complementarity and the coordination of efforts between various partners is

important. The commitment of the OIF is to complement existing efforts.

The creation of a radio station for the youth of the Sahel and the Solidarity Fund for Women will also benefit the people of the Sahel.

The next OIF summit is scheduled to take place sometime later this year. What will be the priority issues addressed at the summit?

The Francophonie summit takes place every two years. The last one held in October 2018 took place in Yerevan in Armenia and the next one is scheduled in Tunisia. This important meeting allows heads of state and government to develop a shared vision of La Francophonie and to set priorities that the organisation's secretariat implements.

Recently, President of the Republic of Tunisia Kais Saied and Louise Mushikiwabo, Secretary general of La Francophonie, agreed to postpone the XVIII Francophonie Summit to 2021. This summit will be important because of its theme 'Connectivity in diversity: the digital vector of development and solidarity in the French-speaking world'.

> We are moving from 'big data' to 'fast data', with promising prospects in the development of quantum computing

This is an important question. It is the continuation and strengthening of a long-term commitment. For example, La Francophonie has contributed a lot to the development of free software and made it possible to ensure a certain linguistic balance, because beyond the digital divide, the Internet must also reflect the diversity of the world and the richness of human culture on our planet.

We are moving from 'big data' to 'fast data', with promising prospects in the development of 'quantum computing', which will further accelerate the vast field known as artificial intelligence. The wish of the Francophonie secretary general is that young Francophones, universities and research centres participate and contribute positively to these changes, in all fields, including education, health, energy, agriculture, etc. These positive changes must be supported within the framework of dialogue in the multilateral space, in UN organisations and in regional organisations, particularly in Africa.

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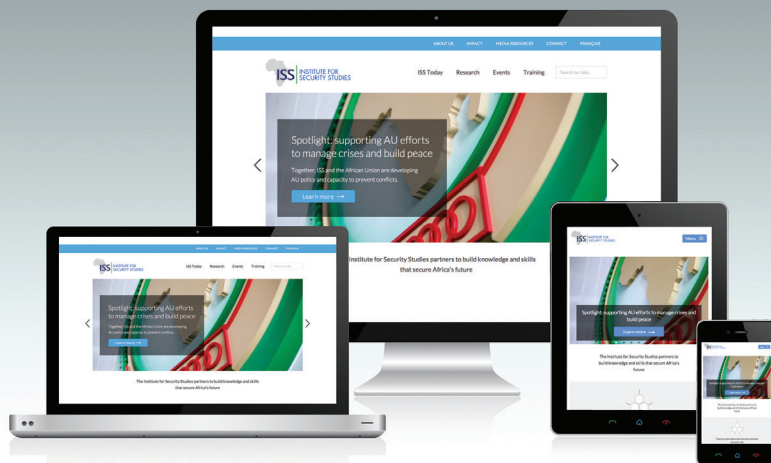
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