

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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African leaders to scale up efforts against unconstitutional changes of government; terrorism and foreign mercenaries

The resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government; the expanding threat of terrorism and violent extremism across the continent, including the influx of foreign terrorist fighters, private military companies and mercenaries, the proliferation of armed groups, as well as transnational organized crime, continue to negatively impact the peace, security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states.



To stem the upsurge of the increasingly worrying situation, African Heads of State and Government convened an Extraordinary Summit on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes in Africa on May 28, 2022, in Malabo. They assessed the persistent threats and current response mechanisms, as they sought to strengthen the collective security of Member States facing terrorism and violent extremism, as well as unconstitutional changes of governments.

African Union Commission Chairperson H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat noted that terrorism increased on the continent from 2011, with the Libyan crisis. This opened the way for the arrival of foreign mercenaries in the Sahel and an influx of terrorist organizations defeated in the Middle East. Terrorism has since spread to other parts of the continent. From Libya to Mozambique, Mali, the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, Somalia, the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and eastern DRC, the terrorist contagion continues to grow.

But Africa did not wait to react. The African Union established joint forces to fight terrorism, such as AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia, the Joint Multinational Force in the Lake Chad Basin, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the SADC mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), and bilateral initiatives in Mozambique.

The Union also reactivated legal instruments to combat terrorism, such as the Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism adopted in 2002, the operational framework of the OAU Convention on Combating Terrorism adopted in 1999 and its Protocol adopted in 2004, the Johannesburg Declaration on the initiative to silence the guns, and the AU Roadmap on Practical Measures to Silence the Guns in Africa by 2030.

H.E. Moussa Faki, noted that in spite of these initiatives, terrorism has continued to flourish, because of the lack of inter African solidarity with the countries fighting terrorism, and “because we do not honour our own commitments”. He gave the example of the African Standby Force that has not yet become operational since its inception, and added that provision of the necessary means to existing armies, among others, would mean that Africa would not depend on foreign forces to fight terrorism.

The Chairperson also observed double standards that are applied by the international community in confronting challenges of terrorism in Africa vis-a-vis other parts of the world.

While underlining the nexus between terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government, the Chairperson observed, “We have all recently witnessed with consternation and concern, the return in force of military coups in some of our member states. We are witnessing the resurgence of a practice that we thought was gone forever with the advent of a new age, which promised a democratic era... The stability of democratic institutions is a guarantee for economic and social development. Conversely, breaks from democratic processes bring about the problems on the continent. Consequently, we need to analyse the causes of the resurgence of military usurpation of power and determine the appropriate therapy.”

According to the African Union Algiers-based African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), between 2012 and 2020, terrorist attacks on the continent increased four-fold, while there were 508 terrorist strikes across the continent in 2012 that resulted in 2,563 casualties. The number of attacks increased to 2,034 in 2020 resulting in 8,631 deaths, thereby representing 400% and 237% rises in attacks and deaths respectively. Women, children and the youth often suffer the consequences of terrorist attacks, as victims and sometimes as perpetrators.

Research by ACSRT also shows that several structural factors are responsible for the spread of the threat. Chief among these are, transnational organized crime and financing of terrorism; proliferation of arms, resurgence of the role of foreign fighters and mercenaries; political instability; chronic governance deficits and the resultant worsening poverty and inequality; deliberate misinterpretation and misrepresentation of religion; as well as weak defence and law enforcement response capacities.

H.E Joao Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola and Vice Chairperson of the African Union highlighted hunger, poverty, unemployment, lack of industrialization, and lack of socio-economic development as part of the missing link to finding a sustainable solution to peace and security on the continent. He at the same time underscored the importance of effectively protecting borders to deter the ill activities that take place in porous borders, making them a conducive environment for terrorists. “We must look at internal reasons that lead to instability and make our people vulnerable to exploitative ideologies. We must find political and economic solutions because terrorism is compounding the issues of hunger, poverty and displaced persons. There’s need for firmness not only in condemning but in taking actions against those who take power through unconstitutional means.”

H.E Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea observed that Africa has accumulated decade after decade of losses that perpetuate under development, instability and recurrent violence. He added that in the recent years, terrorism has represented a threat that is growing in the Maghreb and Sahel Regions. It has also multiplied in the Gulf of Guinea. While there are international criminal organisations, the President noted that local criminals also continue to threaten the sovereignty of states while fueling corruption and using the illicitly gained funds to undermine leadership of government and infiltrating armies to acquire power. “The fight against terrorism is not an act that one country can achieve on its own, it requires teamwork, international cooperation and collaboration. We must also pay attention to financing of terrorism. Terrorists are not able to act on their own without funding for their operations: being able to cut these financing channels would diminish significantly the capacities of these terrorists. We must probe the origin and

sources of the weapons owned by terrorists as well as entities that offer military training.”

The president also condemned the trend of unconstitutional changes of government on the continent, a trend that increased in 2021 and 2022. “Many unconstitutional changes of government have been generated or caused by external factors with the involvement of foreign fighters and mercenaries to safeguard their political and economic interests, which constitute threats to peace and security on the continent,” he added.

Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), highlighted positive results from a combination of successful action against Boko Haram and the related socio-economic initiatives aimed at re-integration and reconciliation in the affected countries. “At their request, we have supported Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Somalia with the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. We have also worked with Tunisia and Uganda on initiatives focused on the management of violent extremists in prisons and detention facilities, with the aim of preventing terrorist radicalization in those environments. The new UNOCT offices in Kenya and Morocco will play an important role in helping African Member States build the capacities they need to prevent and counter violent extremism”, he stated.

A Declaration of the Extraordinary Summit on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes will soon be published at www.au.int.

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