

AU standby force to be operational by 2015

By Elias Gebreselassie

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The African Union (AU) expects its standby force made up from five brigades covering the five regions of the continent to be operational by 2015.

The troops are expected to be deployed either in a preventive mandate or in the context of the implementation of peace agreements made to end conflicts.

The force which has so far been lacking full operational capability is expected to have 3,300 troops with an annual budget of USD 300 million planned.

The AU said the inactiveness of its Standby force, has however not prevented it from deploying peace support operations in countries such as Somalia, Comoros, Burundi, and Darfur.

It also said notwithstanding financial challenges which it faced in places like this, it has ongoing deployments, and is also settling disputes and harmonizing interests of various parties in conflicts.

Wane El Ghassim director of the peace and security Department of the African Union (AU) said the organization has so far liaison offices in different regions so that it can on daily basis interact with Regional Economic Commissions (RECs). The RECs have also opened up their own liaison offices to the AU.

“AUPSC Protocol basis for operations”

El Ghassim said AUPSC has adopted a protocol elaborating a cooperative relationship not only between the organization and the UN.

The AU said through its peace and Security Council protocol, has developed relationship with organizations such as the EU, association of francophone countries and Arab League.

It also said that it equally importantly provided a cooperative relationship between AUPSC and the regional communities within Africa through being actively involved in prevention, resolution and management of conflicts in their respective areas.

The AUPSC further said it has started to play an important role with civil societies which are a new thing, compared to its predecessor the Organization of African Union (OAU) as well as providing for a funding mechanism.

African NGOs have previously briefed the AUPSC on a range of issues from justice to human rights.

“You have a peace fund which is funded through AU contributions, but also partners contributions” said El Ghassim further stating that the peace fund has been instrumental in helping the AU deploy peace support operations on the ground, but also undertake other conflict management activities.

“Achievements underrated”

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One notable success the AU felt was often overlooked is the creation of a Peace and Security architecture through the foundation of the council which it says is by in large operational. The African Union peace and security architecture is provided for under the AU Peace and Security Council protocol which came into force in December 2003.

It was adopted in Durban, South Africa in July 2002 as part of the efforts to enhance the capacity of AU to deal with crisis and conflict situations in the continent.

AUPSC has been operational since March 2004 and has dealt with most if not all of the conflict situations in the continent.

“In many respects the AUPSC protocol marked a watershed if you compare it to the early OAU instruments dealing with peace and security” stated El Ghassim adding that the council members are elected unlike the early OAU organ called central organ where the members weren’t elected.

“Our successes are notable be it in Darfur, Sudan, Somalia, or the ongoing operation against the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in several countries, AFISMA in Mali” said El Ghassim.

“EU providing 300 mln Euros”

It was also revealed at the meeting that the EU has set up an Africa peace facility with 300 million Euros, to provide support for AU or African led peace keeping operations and mediation efforts.

“We also have ongoing dialogue on issues of common concern, and on February 5th, there will be a meeting on support and follow up group on the situation in Mali which will be hosted by the EU” stated El Ghassim.

The AUPSC also has yearly meeting with the UNSC in New York and Addis Ababa, and also with European Union Peace and Security Committee, once a year in Brussels and Addis Ababa. It also has extensive powers to prevent conflicts, to deal with conflict situations, to deploy peace and security operations and even to take actions to prevent war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

“Early warning system established”

AUPSC says the protocol is also important because it provides for the establishment of other institutions to support it; among them being the Early Warning Systems (EWS) to anticipate and facilitate the prevention of conflict.

It also said it recently hired a number of analysts to strengthen its analytical capability and beefing up its EWS which is made up of the AU and regional organization centres.

Among them is a panel created to anticipate and facilitate the prevention of conflicts, made up of five outstanding African personalities with a view to assist the AUC and the AUPSC in the prevention of conflicts.

The panel is expected to deal with conflicts related to elections, which has been quite problematic in the African continent, especially post-election periods.

Partnerships a necessity for Africa

“Africa is not living in an island we’re working with partners like the United Nations and the European Union (EU)” El Ghassim said adding that AU works with bilateral partners because the challenges and interests the continent faces are to some extent are challenges to its partners.

The AU emphasised its partnerships bilaterally and with multilateral organization, as among its challenges are its funding shortages for its myriad missions.

El Ghassim said when the mission in Darfur initially was launched it was initially costing about USD 300 million a year while the current cost of mission in Somalia is about double of this

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amount.

“Prevention of conflicts to be emphasized”

The AUPSC says it plans to redouble its efforts in the area of prevention, precisely because peacekeeping operations arrive after conflict has broken out and are quite expensive.

A special attention it has given is to the proliferation of weapons and their impact in the Sahel and Sahara region, which it raised its concern nearly two years ago.

In March 2012 in Bamako, Mali it had joint meeting with the United Nations to formulate an AU strategy on the Sahel region which was adopted by its peace and Security Council.

“Usurpation not to be tolerated”

The AU also reaffirmed its stand against abuse of power be it through coups or manipulating constitutions.

“Wherever a rebellion has broken out be it in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (C.A.R) or Mali we’ve clearly indicated that we absolutely reject the recourse to armed rebellion as well as any seizure of power by force, so it’s a principled position” stated El Ghassim.

He said this position was beefed up with the entry into force of the AU charter on democracy, governance and elections to also ban all other types of manipulation such as with constitutional term limits.

The AU said it has acknowledged that there needs to be a space for political debate, for citizens to put forward their claims with appropriate mechanism, with freedom of press being a cornerstone.

Instruments such as the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), on corruption, good governance, human rights have been adopted over the past two decades, to provide a transparent and accountable administration.

“To be frank, most of the conflicts in Africa are related to governance issues, and the more governance improves in the continent, the less likely conflicts will happen in the continent” ” El Ghassim states.