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4th Edition

APSACO

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Annual Conference

4th EDITION - 2020

COVID-19 & Security in Africa

General Rapporteur

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SUMMARY REPORT

Rabat, September 23rd, 24th, 25th 2020.

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Virtual edition

Introduction:

The fourth edition of the African Peace & Security Annual Conference (APSACO) was held on September 23-25, 2020 under the theme 'COVID-19 & Security in Africa.' The three-day event, organized by the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS), was composed of two panels and two workshops:

- **Panel 1:** The Security Sector in Africa During and After the COVID-19 Health Crisis
- **Panel 2:** The Privatization of Violence in Africa: Non-State Armed Groups and Private Security
- **Workshop 1:** Human Security Index in Africa
- **Workshop 2:** Global Peace Index

As has become the trademark of PCNS conferences, APSACO gathered experts from different parts of the world, fields, and professions – from the military and political world to academics and the civil society – to ensure a broad and fruitful conversation. This report presents and summarizes the chairs' and speakers' interventions and the main issues tackled during the conference. More information on the participants, the agenda, and other details is annexed to this document.

Opening remarks:

In his opening speech, Mr. **Rachid El Houdaigui**, Senior Fellow at the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS), welcomed the participants and briefly shared the think tank's immediate shift within the health context related COVID-19. The PCNS has committed

to facilitating experience sharing between North & South experts on issues regarding the management of the health crisis, its challenges, and its geopolitical implications. In this dynamic, the think tank has organized several conferences and produced more than 2,000 papers during 2020.



Mr. El Houdaigui proceeded by framing the context of APSACO's 4th edition that emerged from the PCNS conviction that COVID-19 has also triggered a sustainable shift of paradigm as regards the normative context for security in Africa, taking into account the continental, national, and regional specificities. In fact, as Africa prepares to confront the health-related challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the necessary measures taken to prevent the virus spreading are having major implications for economies, political governance, and peace and security. These implications pose the critical question of Africa's ability to absorb the consequences of COVID-19 as the continent faces the loss of livelihoods for millions of citizens, popular uprisings, threats of food shortages, terrorism, the halting of ongoing peace support operations, and a surge in gender-based violence.

This edition, like previous ones, aimed to provide a space for dialogue around different themes, namely the fundamental issues related to safety and security dictated by COVID-19, the interplay of stakeholders, and the formulation of pragmatic recommendations. He stressed how think tanks and the academic world upheld the burden of producing paradigms and alternative solutions through a strategic and security-based approach.

Needless to say, current actors in international civil society are largely from the Anglo-Saxon world, which is why it is important for the PCNS to position itself within that international civil society and offer perspectives and perceptions of its own. These efforts are part of a wider goal to create and promote a fruitful interactive community providing an 'African' perspective on global and regional issues at stake. In that regard, APSACO offers a great platform prone to debate, dialogue, and critical reflection.

Panel 1: The Security Sector in Africa During and After COVID-19 Health Crisis:



This panel, moderated by **Badreddine El Harti**, Principal Rule of Law and Security Institutions (RoLSI) Adviser at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), examined the impact of the pandemic on the security sector in

Africa while shedding the light on areas that should be enhanced to counter conflicts and crimes under the rule of law:

- National strategies to counter borders threats;
- Securing the fight against COVID-19 and the rule of law;
- Exacerbation of pre-existing conflicts;
- Strengthening States capacities to limit conflicts and crimes;
- New patterns for post-COVID-19 security in Africa?

Yonas Adaye Adeto, Director of the Institute for Peace & Security Studies (IPSS), emphasized that, when we discuss security, we isolate three aspects in particular: the source (COVID-19); the referent object (humans, and Africans in this case); and the nature of the



solution. Indeed, COVID-19 has affected African communal life. It has also affected industrial activities like services and farming, increasing unemployment in the process. So, what should be done? Firstly, restart community-based activities. As people live hand-to-mouth, resilience-building initiatives and food sharing will be important. Secondly, African governments should not emphasize lockdowns like other continents, and instead keep encouraging masks and distance keeping. Thirdly, keep increasing awareness through community professionals like teachers.



Giovanni Faleg, Senior Analyst at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) highlighted how the security sector in Africa post-COVID-19 should be by the people, for the people, and with the people. The current pandemic

marks a turning point for international security; it has surpassed the traditional notions of military security or national security, and a health crisis is the quintessential security threat for the human race. He stressed that an economic fall-out will add more pressure on states, especially weak or conflict-ridden ones. Conflict-transitions or reforms are under threat, and complex security infrastructures like the G5 Sahel will be impacted by COVID-19 with decreasing budgets for security. Humanitarian aspects also have a direct impact on security threats. Food shortages, inflation and displacement, which are either directly or indirectly related to COVID-19, can exacerbate existing social tensions and issues. Social unrest in response to lockdowns can exert pressure on local and national authorities. This might cause states to increase repression and become less democratic than before. For example, recent military patrols in some cities may decrease trust between citizenry and elites. Ultimately, COVID-19 is likely to act as a catalyst and as a booster of pre-existing drivers for fragility and conflict.

Said Abass Ahamed, Director of Thinking Africa, underlined that if we are analyzing the security sector in weak or failed states, two examples from the field can be looked at: Central African Republic; and Democratic Republic of Congo. Indeed, the process of security sector reform looks like an endless process (there have been 10 in the aforementioned countries in the last 10 years). COVID-19 will only exacerbate issues like limited budgets or fatigue from donors. Donors used to drive policies, but now that will change. In fact, donors have their own priorities, such as healthcare, so states need to find the money for their security sector programs.



Khalid Chegraoui, Senior Fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, noted that in Africa, the weakness of governance structures and the absence of effective policies and strategies to counter the negative impact of instability and the COVID-19 crisis have been exposed. The issue of COVID-19 is not homogenous; there are significant differences between countries in Africa. Accordingly, the risk profiles of various countries are different, with disparate levels of vulnerabilities and strengths. COVID-19 can be an opportunity for the state to reconcile with society, allowing it to take up its responsibilities of assistance and protection as opposed to repression, and allowing citizens to work together towards a shared aim.

Panel 2: The Privatization of Violence in Africa: Non-State Armed Groups and Private Security



On the second day of the APSACO event, the panel discussed the Privatization of Violence in Africa with a focus on non-state armed groups and private security. The debate, moderated by **Alioune Ndiaye**, Head of the Peace Division at the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), highlighted the evolution of organized crime in Africa while exploring the privatization of security under international law:

- Exploitation of the COVID-19 health crisis by extremist groups;
- Evolution of organized crime in Africa;
- Private actors at the service of human security in Africa, between cohabitation and rejection;
- Does the privatization of security contribute to the exacerbation of tensions and conflicts?
- Private military companies in Africa under international law.



Afua Bouatema Yakohene, argued that there are three levels of political violence: the low level (active groups who are encouraged by the state to push for their political goals); the medium level (active groups above the average, activities

happening within national geographical borders); and the high level (groups who have moved beyond national borders into the international space, such as Boko Haram or al-Shabaab). He also put forward two observations: state dependence on the use of force to achieve control; and the politicization and neglect of state security apparatus (opposition relying on private companies to ensure political and economic gains).

For **Rida Lyammouri**, the Sahel was a multidimensional conflict involving different actors and issues such as al-Qaeda affiliated groups, national and regional armies, international forces, and the new vigilante and self-defense groups. This conflict is caused by the results of injustice and inequality. He also proposed a few recommendations to stabilize the region:



- National and regional governments: move away from the terrorism narrative. Terrorism is not the main issue of these countries, but the consequence of deeper issues related to the rule of law and governance issues. Terrorism will always exist and evolve and find a way to exist, including through criminal activities. It is very difficult to eradicate, but we could create an environment where violence and terrorism in particular cannot exist. Communities in the Sahel are resilient and have sources of resilience that international and national partners could develop and exploit to prevent further violence.
- International community and forces, mainly France: In addition to focusing on eliminating key figures or leaders of jihadist, groups, in collaboration with other partners, should also focus on sidelining other individuals that contribute to the increasing violence, such as criminal networks. Communities are getting tired

of seeing those individuals holding influential positions and achieving political and economic objectives at their expense.

- Key to work and develop the capacity of local institutions on how to monitor, collect, and analyze information.



On the other hand, **Duncan E. Omondi Gumba** referred to evidence drawn from the organized crime index carried out by Enact Project. Criminal actors are defined, in this index, as either state-embedded actors, external or foreign criminal

actors, internal or domestic actors, or mafia-type groups. All these actors play not only a leading role in exacerbating violence in Africa, but also challenge the state's monopoly of violence if corrupt elements in government allow them and collaborate with them in their illicit activities. The cases of high-prevalence and significant negative influence of these groups is present in countries like Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, and South Africa. These countries are the ones that have all those groups linked together. It is the case because they have groups with: very high levels of organization; long history of influence; widespread networks organized from major cities with close collaboration with local groups. They are able to maintain their activity through:

- High level of official corruption;
- Clientelism: in Mali, Chad, Mozambique, Uganda, South Africa and Kenya, for example, media actors have become political entrepreneurs;
- Ease of operation;
- Ease of settling;
- Operating as intermediaries between the domestic and international criminal markets.

El Mostafa Rezaei

underlined the implication of private contractors, which weaken the security infrastructure. The violent extremist organizations (VEOs) have created their own narrative concerning the pandemic, and by reviewing their posts on social media, their attacks are almost 300% higher than what is reported by conventional media, which creates a very confusing situation: is it an immediate threat or a medium-term one?



If we are looking at the narrative concerning this health crisis, we find that one of the strategies by these groups is to ask their followers to preserve the group and protect it, whilst the second strategy is of course to take advantage of this health crisis and carry out attacks and reorganize themselves.

The expert noted two phenomena that merit further: monitor violent extremist media and be aware of the preparedness of these groups to counter terrorism.

Workshop 1: Human Security Index in Africa



Facilitated by **Jalal Abdellatif**, Senior Fellow and the Policy Center for the New South, this workshop fell within UNECA's contribution to "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development." The overall objective of the workshop was to provide an

overview of the principles that embody the human security approach and elaborate on the use of human security as a tool for developing effective policies and programs by governments and non-governmental entities, as well as regional and sub-regional intergovernmental institutions, towards the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. The specific objectives of the workshop were to:

- Probe human security concepts, practices, and methodologies;
- Identify the relevance and significance of developing an African perspective on human security;
- Explore the nexus of economic security, peace, and human security;
- Leverage an AU – ECA human security approach aligned with AU Agenda 2063 and UN 2030 Agenda;
- And develop the set of recommendations that will form the way forward on the efforts of developing a methodology.

According to **Sara Mokaddem**, International Relations Specialist at the Policy Center for the New South, the concept of security has changed from a traditional approach based on external threats of wars to a more human security approach. The modern people-centered approach demonstrates that state security is beyond wars as it takes into consideration several threats that can erode the safety and lives of people. The human



security approach emphasizes solely the idea of human life. That being said. Multiple Human Security best practices have been adopted from the Human Development Index. Given that the Human Security Index highlights the importance of threats beyond wars, the HDI indicates that an economic rise is not sufficient for people to attain health, educational, and environmental security. Human insecurity remains present at the international level. In Africa most human security issues are believed to be the result of domestic factors, yet human insecurity in Africa is likely to be the outcome of foreign and external dynamics.

Eleanor Keeble, Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute, presented a toolkit based on three aspects aiming to assist African decision makers in addressing human security in Africa. The toolkit should primarily be usable, meaning that it should be simple to use and understandable for both decision



makers and the general public. Secondly, it should be meaningful in the sense that it should have a concrete effect by improving people's lives. Last but not least, the toolkit has to be adaptable to each state as priorities and interests differ. The African human security index forecasts different components compared to other regions of the globe. For example, water scarcity probably remains one of the greatest threats to human security in Africa compared to other regions of the world.



According to **Saad Badaoui**, Data Scientist at the Policy Center for the New South, the seven elements of the African Human Security Index will help the United Nations tackle a wide range of complex issues in Africa. Breaking down data of the seven elements of AHSI through the use of

the decision trees model will help achieve valuable information. In the African context it is crucial to avoid the lag effect. Data should be comparable, reliable, and available. However, African data is less likely to be available and reliable in some cases. Mixing data from two different time-periods as the result of the unavailability of Africa's data is a misleading approach for the African Human Security Index.

Workshop 2: Global Peace Index



Moderated by **Omayra Issa**, Journalist and News Anchor, the workshop explored the evolution of civil unrest over the past decade and new frontiers in research. It featured findings on COVID-19 and peace, outlining the global impact of the pandemic, resilience, and coping capabilities of countries. Changes in socio-economic systems and in patterns of conflict and violence were also presented. The workshop also examined key aspects of the post-pandemic world and commented on forward-looking initiatives to reshape the global economy.

Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), forecasted that despite the poor and inexistent health infrastructure in Mali, the COVID-19 pandemic would have little impact on the population as numbers indicate that 80 percent of the Malian cases recovered, and only 30 deaths were registered. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) embargo on Mali worsened an already intricate situation. That being said, Annadif highlighted that solidarity was crucial among countries, especially in a phase where the world, and most predominantly Africa, is in need of peace, security, and stability.



Serge Stroobants, Director Europe and the MENA Region at the Institute for Economics & Peace, indicated that there are multiple factors contributing to the decline of global peace. The fact that Europe is adjacent to vulnerable and unstable regions has undeniably impacted and decreased the level of peace within the EU. The MENA region being the least peaceful region in the world, with domestic

crises in countries such as Syria and Iraq also having an impact. The rise of internal destabilization in Central American countries, which increases as elections approach, and the fact that non-state actors fight each other, are both factors determining the decline of Global Peacefulness by 0.34%. The Civil Unrest indicator portrays violence mainly related to strikes within a society and remains one of the most recent Global Peace Index indicators. It highlights an astonishing rise of 244% and argues that in Europe strikes often do not ultimately end in violence, whereas, in Africa data shows that the probability of violence after demonstrations is extremely high. Data estimates the cost of violence at to 14.5 trillion dollars, a figure that represents 40% of most African countries' total GDP, and 11% of the globe's GDP. The vast majority of African countries' expenditure is spent on managing violence, though it could be spent more efficiently on climate change issues. COVID-19 and the Global Peace Index GPI are demonstrating that economic decline is leading to less military expenditures and international aid development. On the other hand, global powers such as the U.S., China, and others are taking a more competitive approach, as opposed to a collaborative one. Last but not least, data portrays a staggering increase in mental health conditions, suicides, and violence.



For **Rama Yade**, Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, multilateralism is peace and peace is threatened in the absence of multilateralism. Africa should not be the only one to be held accountable for its current wars since multilateralism is constantly in jeopardy in Africa.

Last but not least, **Abdelhak Bassou**, Senior Fellow and the Policy Center for the New South, stressed the importance of tackling the issue of Africa from its origins rather than its symptoms by addressing concrete governance issues and the poor distribution of Africa's wealth.



Closing remarks:

Mr. **Rachid El Houdaigui** said it was a privilege and an honor to be entrusted with such an undertaking at a virtual gathering of such eminent people from different parts of the peace and security sector. There was, indeed, plenty to reflect upon and this would enhance our individual and collective contributions to addressing global peace and security challenges.

During the three days of the fourth edition of APSACO, guests and experts analyzed the impact of the pandemic on existing peace and security threats and responses in Africa. They considered various dimensions of the challenges facing governments, regional organizations, and civil societies. Numerous positions and points of view were outlined and many messages were delivered, covering the whole spectrum of security in Africa amid COVID-19, as seen from the perspective of researchers, officials and civil society alike.

The conference provided an effective platform for debate on how to improve the performance of countries – through their different stakeholders – to implement relevant peace and security dimensions on the ground in the COVID-19 era.

Last but not least, Mr. El Houdaigui, expressed how invaluable the presence of all speakers and participants had been. He thanked everyone for their support and added that the views expressed during the APSACO conference would be disseminated to a wider readership and audience, a task which would be entrusted to very capable hands.

