



Security Council

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Letter dated 15 October 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to paragraph 11 of Security Council resolution [2320 \(2016\)](#) on strengthening the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union in peace and security, in which the Council requested that I report to it following the completion of an assessment of United Nations-African Union cooperation and the structure and capacity of the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) to meet the growing demands of the partnership.

An independent team leader, Said Djinnit, was selected to lead this assessment. He was supported by an interdepartmental team that included representatives from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Operational Support, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Development Coordination Office. A wider consultative group in New York included the Department of Global Communications, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Evolution of the partnership

The assessment team recognized that the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union is one of the most important relationships, particularly in the domain of peace and security, today. It confirmed a broad consensus that a strong partnership between the United Nations and the African Union was essential to addressing the range of peace and security challenges in Africa. The assessment team noted that in this regard, most partners considered the 2017 Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security to be an important tool for the United Nations Secretariat and the African Union Commission in deepening their cooperation. It also affirmed that the efforts of the current leadership at both organizations to deepen the partnership were widely appreciated. However, many interlocutors underscored the need to focus the partnership on the implementation of joint efforts and initiatives at the country and regional levels.

Interlocutors also stated that cooperation on cross-cutting issues, such as women and youth, as well as on the nexus between peace and development, should be further strengthened.



The assessment team highlighted that the past five years have seen a significant improvement in the working relations between African Union and United Nations envoys, including in field missions and non-mission settings. However, it noted that the time had come to institutionalize the partnership at all levels of the two organizations to ensure systematic cooperation that can withstand future changes in leadership in either one or both organizations.

The assessment team identified that at the subregional level, the best examples of collaboration between the United Nations, the African Union and regional economic communities and regional mechanisms with regard to conflict prevention were with United Nations regional offices, such as the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa. In crisis situations, they have demonstrated a comparative advantage in the timely harmonization of positions between the United Nations, the African Union and the relevant regional economic community/regional mechanism, while working closely with United Nations Headquarters.

Furthermore, the assessment team commended the support provided by the United Nations to the operationalization of the African Union Mediation Support Unit and the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, as well as the work of the African Women Leaders Network, which was launched in 2017.

The assessment team recognized that collaboration between the United Nations and the African Union in support of African Union peace support operations had progressively increased over the past decade and was a strong component of the partnership. In his report on options for authorization and support for African Union peace support operations ([S/2017/454](#)), the Secretary-General provided detailed recommendations on the planning and oversight of those operations. That report followed up on the report of the joint African Union-United Nations review of available mechanisms to finance and support African Union peace support operations authorized by the United Nations Security Council ([A/71/410-S/2016/809](#)), which concluded that while preventive efforts had failed, the two organizations had effectively worked together to deploy peace support operations, including in Burundi, Darfur, Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic. However, the United Nations-African Union partnership on peace support operations was faced with a range of unprecedented challenges for which both organizations adopted context-specific mechanisms for cooperation. The review also noted that both organizations recognized the value of developing a general framework for joint planning, mandating compliance and oversight of African Union peace support operations.

On the other hand, the past decade has also witnessed an increase in ad hoc security arrangements comprising mainly military forces deployed to stabilize conflict zones in a subregion, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force deployed to respond to Boko Haram, and the Group of Five for the Sahel deployed to combat various non-State armed groups across the Sahel. These coalitions of States, based on collective self-defence, operate outside of the official framework of the regional economic communities/regional mechanisms.

The assessment team affirmed that these coalitions posed particular challenges for the United Nations and the African Union as they operated largely in their own territories and have the potential to conduct cross-border operations in hot pursuit; were established outside of the geographical boundaries of the African Union regional standby force; were based on voluntary contributions, which challenged command and control by the United Nations or the African Union; and had no reporting or accountability to either the United Nations Security Council or the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, despite having been authorized by both.

The assessment team also noted that the United Nations management and peace and security reforms of January 2019 helped streamline the interface between United Nations Headquarters and the African Union. The reforms created an Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the regional structure responsible for peace and security, matching the geographical coverage of the African Union. There is one office responsible for providing strategic, political and operational backstopping of the partnership, namely the African Union Partnership Team. Reform of the United Nations also created a Support Partnerships Service in the Department of Operational Support which serves as the focal point for support to non-United Nations peace operations, including African Union peace support operations.

Key factors that affect the partnership

The assessment team underscored that the United Nations-African Union partnership was affected by several structural factors and organizational culture. It identified the relationship between the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union as one of the most important engagements in this partnership, but also noted that despite a decade of discussions and annual meetings, this engagement still had room for improvement. Challenges centred on the working methods governing the engagement of the Councils, including joint visits, the response to the situation in Libya and the financing for peace support operations.

The assessment team noted that these differences were rooted in mutual misperceptions regarding the roles and responsibilities of the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union respectively; and a perceived disregard for the views of the Peace and Security Council.

As a result, achieving strategic convergence between the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union will not be easy, and this may continue to affect the cooperation between the two organizations. Nonetheless, all interlocutors expressed the need to deepen cooperation between the Councils, including through better engagement of the three elected African Member States of the United Nations Security Council. Joint United Nations-African Union action to prevent and respond to conflict is complicated by ambiguity over the application of the principle of subsidiarity between the United Nations, the African Union and its regional economic communities/regional mechanisms.

The assessment team called for increased interlinkages and operational coherence of the several frameworks between the United Nations Secretariat and African Union Commission. The assessment team also recognized that in spite of the joint work by both organizations to strengthen humanitarian response, human rights, development, peace and security, the cross-pillar linkages required further articulation.

With regard to peacebuilding, while the United Nations and the African Union were working on increasing their operational coherence, the assessment team suggested that the lack of joint integrated analysis and planning undermined the coherence of multilateral peacebuilding efforts and did not meet the expectations of the African Union with regard to it playing a more prominent role in peacebuilding.

While noting the progress made by African countries in organizing elections, the assessment team identified two areas where challenges remained: the limited capacity of electoral management bodies and constitutional courts; and the weak management of political transitions following successful elections.

United Nations Office to the African Union

UNOAU was established on 1 July 2010 by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/288 to streamline the presence of the United Nations Secretariat in Addis Ababa working on peace and security matters; enhance the United Nations partnership with the African Union in the area of peace and security; and provide coordinated and consistent United Nations support to the African Union on both short-term operational support matters and long-term institutional capacity-building.

The assessment team noted that while this broad mandate still remained valid, the role of UNOAU had evolved with the partnership, and more so with the signing of the aforementioned Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. Since its establishment, the strength of the Office has focused on providing support for the planning and management of existing African Union peace support operations and other missions and the development of institutional policies and practices in conflict prevention, mediation, rule of law, human rights, security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The assessment found widespread appreciation for UNOAU and its role as the primary daily interface with the African Union. Most partners expressed support for the strengthening of the Office and noted the exemplary role that the leadership of the Office has played in engaging with partners and increasing the frequency of briefings to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and its senior officials. Accordingly, the assessment team recognized the need to strengthen the coordination role of UNOAU in peace and security.

With regard to the peace and development nexus, the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes that support the African Union in peace, security and development matters requested more consistent coordination between UNOAU and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on the peace and development nexus. The assessment team concurred with the directive issued by the Chef de Cabinet on 21 March 2019 on the coordination of the political, peace and security and development pillars through UNOAU and ECA, respectively.

To ensure coordinated backstopping of UNOAU, the assessment team recommended the creation of an interdepartmental mechanism that connects focal points from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support, and other departments and agencies, with the aim of providing harmonized and holistic support to UNOAU.

Recommendations

Following consultations with various key stakeholders, the assessment team recommends, inter alia, the reprioritization of areas of cooperation. It recommends that in the short- and medium-term, both organizations prioritize a limited number of areas that could lead to tangible cooperation at the country and regional levels. In this regard, it recommends reprioritizing the scope of the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security to focus on prevention, mediation and sustaining peace and peace support operations, while strengthening cross-cutting areas, including those related to gender and women, peace and security, as well as the peace and development nexus. The assessment team further recommends the harmonization of the United Nations-African Union partnership through the development of an overarching United Nations-African Union strategy encompassing the various existing frameworks, as that would improve the internal coherence and coordination of the United Nations with the African Union. It also recommends that the United Nations reinforce its support to African Union continental frameworks, initiatives and mechanisms and strengthen their capacity to

enhance women's participation and protection at the local, national and regional levels.

The following actions are also recommended by the assessment team, as set out below.

1. **Strategic convergence between the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.** The assessment team recommends that the two Councils align and sequence their programmes of work to facilitate the positions taken by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and inform the decisions taken by the United Nations Security Council on the same topic. It recommends that UNOAU facilitate regular informal interactions between representatives of Security Council Member States in Addis Ababa and the members of the Peace and Security Council, with the aim of improving understanding and cooperation between the two Councils. This can be complemented by similar initiatives in New York, facilitated by the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations. Furthermore, in consultation with the African Union, the United Nations should institutionalize the workshop of the Committee of Experts of the Peace and Security Council in New York to discuss Security Council working methods on an annual basis, and consider facilitating reverse visits by experts of the Security Council to the Peace and Security Council.

2. **Conflict prevention.** The assessment team recommends that the two organizations leverage their existing systems to produce monthly early warning analyses and options for early action. Horizon-scanning meetings should include, when feasible, regional desks at United Nations Headquarters and United Nations regional offices, as well as specialized and thematic offices and regional economic communities/regional mechanisms, together with UNOAU and the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa. The assessment team also recommends the establishment of more fully fledged United Nations regional offices to facilitate prevention and mediation efforts, where feasible. In addition, it recommends that the two organizations develop a joint report on the status of prevention in Africa, including enhancement of local, national and regional prevention capacities in Africa.

3. **Election and governance.** The assessment team suggests that the United Nations and the African Union explore ways through which they can jointly strengthen the capacities of national electoral management bodies and constitutional councils. It encourages the United Nations and the African Union to consider options to support and advise States on how to develop frameworks that facilitate democratic transitions from one elected government to the next.

4. **Support to African Union peace support operations.** The assessment team recommends that the United Nations develop a support model that draws on lessons learned from existing United Nations and African Union operations in complex conflict environments, ensuring that the United Nations is both a partner and a service provider to African Union peace support operations. It encourages accelerated efforts by the United Nations and the African Union to further develop consultative decision-making (joint planning, reporting, review processes); financial management (joint budget submissions, reporting); and African Union compliance frameworks (international humanitarian law, human rights, conduct/discipline). The assessment team further recommends that the United Nations strengthen its efforts to assist the African Union in the development of policies and strategic guidance on the conduct of peacekeeping operations, specifically force generation, predeployment planning and training requirements, to ensure adequate operational readiness and command and control.

5. **Emerging ad hoc security arrangements.** Drawing on lessons learned from missions such as the United Nations Support Office in Somalia and the United

Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, the assessment team recommends that the United Nations and the African Union consider a joint review of ad hoc security arrangements, including enabling factors such as unity of command, use of force and options for support from the United Nations and the African Union.

The assessment team advocates that the United Nations and the African Union further increase their engagement with regional economic communities/regional mechanisms, and that these ad hoc security arrangements promote adherence to the procedures and standards required of all troops, units and individuals serving in African Union-mandated and authorized peace support operations.

6. **Peacebuilding.** The assessment team identifies the need to move beyond project-focused collaboration with the African Union towards the effective coordination and implementation of structural prevention at the country level. The assessment team also recommends that the United Nations advocate with the World Bank and the European Union for the full integration of the African Union into multilateral peacebuilding assessments and planning processes, such as recovery and peacebuilding assessments, to strengthen ownership and coherence.

7. **Clear and predictable application of the principle of subsidiarity.** The assessment team recommends strengthening continental cohesion through the inclusion of the heads of regional economic communities/regional mechanisms in United Nations-African Union high-level meetings held on a biannual basis. It further suggests that the engagement of the United Nations with both the regional economic communities/regional mechanisms and the African Union would encourage continental cohesion and ensure adequate coordination.

Observations

I wish to convey my deep gratitude to the African Union Commission, members of the United Nations Security Council, the Group of African States, representatives of the European Union and other international partners for the strong collaboration and support extended to the assessment team.

I fully concur with the conclusion of the assessment team that the United Nations-African Union partnership is one of the most important relationships in the domain of international peace and security and a cornerstone of multilateralism. Current peace and security challenges on the African continent are extremely complex and neither the United Nations nor the African Union can address these on their own. Partnership is therefore essential.

Moreover, I take note of the recommendation of the assessment team that the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union need to align and sequence their programmes of work as much as possible in order to facilitate the positions taken by the Peace and Security Council and inform decisions taken by the Security Council on the same topics. In this regard, I welcome the implementation of the commitment made by the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council at their twelfth joint annual consultative meeting, held in New York on 19 July 2018, in particular their intention to agree on the modalities for joint visits in Africa. The United Nations Secretariat stands ready to provide support in this regard. The three elected African Member States of the United Nations Security Council could play a key role in promoting coherence between the two Councils.

I believe that both our organizations and our action in Africa would benefit from the further institutionalization of collaboration between our organizations at all levels and, to this end, following the election of the commissioners of African Union

Commission, I will explore with them the possibility of convening a senior leadership retreat between the African Union and the United Nations to strengthen the partnership.

These efforts should be complemented by the sustainment of our commitment to work together, including through joint assessments, planning, retreats, joint work streams and workshops. We should also explore the possibility of expanding the knowledge and expertise exchange programme, currently focused on enhancing cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations in the area of operational support matters, to other disciplines.

Furthermore, I endorse the recommendation for reprioritizing the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security to focus on prevention, mediation and sustaining peace and peace support operations, while strengthening the involvement of women and youth in the peace and security agenda, as well as other cross-cutting areas, such as climate change. I concur that fully fledged United Nations regional offices would be valuable in order to facilitate prevention and mediation efforts in coordination with the broader United Nations system, the African Union and regional economic communities/regional mechanisms. In this regard, I have decided to establish an inter-agency task force on the United Nations-African Union partnership to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the assessment team, including with regard to strengthening the peace and development nexus, supported by human rights and humanitarian activities.

I agree with the recommendation to develop an overarching United Nations-African Union strategy encompassing the various United Nations-African Union frameworks to improve the internal coherence, coordination and cross-pillar approach of the United Nations with the African Union.

In this regard, I concur with the recommendation of the assessment team that UNOAU would benefit from additional capacity in order to enable it to more effectively perform that coordination role. I also take note of the capacity misalignment between the two organizations and the burden of cooperation placed on the African Union and I intend to conduct a mapping exercise of the existing cooperation and coordination mechanisms to determine areas for streamlining and simplification.

Taking into account that access to assessed United Nations contributions in support of African Union peace support operations will remain a challenge, I believe that our ability to effectively respond to threats to peace and security on the continent would greatly benefit from a more structured approach to burden-sharing. In this respect, I am pleased to note the expansion of the United Nations operational support role from a partner to both a partner and a service provider to the African Union and, to that end, investment in the development of a support model for African Union peace support operations.

Irrespective of the tool, it is imperative that this objective be achieved, either from voluntary contributions or assessed contributions from the United Nations. I am hopeful that, following the present assessment report, an arrangement to this effect can be agreed upon by the United Nations Security Council, one that meets the legitimate expectations of the African Union and the troop-contributing countries that have been making enormous sacrifices in the pursuit of peace and security in Africa. In the meantime, I intend to develop a United Nations support model for African Union peace support operations jointly with the African Union, within existing mandates.

Sustainable partnership must be grounded in the trust between the two organizations, and it will require improved collaboration among key actors, including

the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, the United Nations Secretariat and the African Union Commission. I fully support the proposal to conduct a regular joint United Nations-African Union review of the partnership. Joint monitoring and review of the partnership will likely enable both organizations to generate accelerated progress and elicit additional support. In the interim, I intend to share an executive summary of the independent strategic assessment with the leadership of the African Union Commission to solicit their feedback and commitment in implementing the recommendations.

It is my sincere hope that the partnership between our two organizations will continue to be strengthened. Much has been achieved, but much also remains to be done. I therefore urge the Security Council to continue to support the strengthening of this partnership and in particular the recommendations of this assessment report.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**
