



Security Council

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Letter dated 25 November 2020 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that South Africa will assume the presidency of the Security Council in December 2020. As part of its meetings, South Africa will convene a high-level debate on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a focus on security sector governance and reform. The debate is scheduled to be held on 3 December 2020, beginning at 8.30 a.m. (New York time).

In order to guide the discussion on the subject, South Africa has prepared a concept note (see annex).

I would appreciate it if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Jerry Matthews **Matjila**
Permanent Representative of the Republic of South Africa



Annex to the letter dated 25 November 2020 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council high-level debate on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a focus on security sector governance and reform, to be held on 3 December 2020

Context

1. Institutional and governance failures within the security sector reduce a State's ability to protect civilians. If left unaddressed, they may result in political grievances with the potential to fuel an outbreak or reoccurrence of conflict.
2. The African Union, in its efforts to silence the guns in Africa as a central aspect of the implementation of its Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, has identified security sector reform as one of the key elements to transform that vision into practice.
3. In post-conflict settings, professionalizing, strengthening and reforming the security sector contribute meaningfully to achieving sustainable peace and development. Those activities are often key to preventing relapses into conflict and are essential prerequisites for preventive diplomacy.
4. It is therefore important that United Nations support for the strengthening of security sector governance and nationally led reform, including through its coordination role, remain firmly grounded in and informed by the security needs of the population, taking into account each unique context and historical experience. The success of security sector reform is ultimately measured against its ability to deliver security and protection to diverse sections of the population and to serve as a basis for reconciliation through dialogue and the inclusion of local communities and their traditional security arrangements.

History of security sector reform within the United Nations

5. Since 2007, there has been a series of statements by the President of the Security Council ([S/PRST/2007/3](#), [S/PRST/2008/14](#) and [S/PRST/2011/19](#)) in which the Council has recognized the role of security sector reform in post-conflict environments and in preventing relapse into conflict, consolidating peace and stability, extending legitimate State authority and laying the ground for long-term development. The Secretary-General, in his first thematic report on security sector reform ([A/62/659-S/2008/39](#)), outlined principles that would guide United Nations support for national security sector reform efforts. In his second report ([A/67/970-S/2013/480](#)), he provided an update on progress in developing United Nations security sector reform guidance, policies and tools and the impact of United Nations support for national security sector reform. Such efforts became increasingly linked to peacebuilding strategies, as reflected in the priorities of the Secretary-General for peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict (see [A/63/881-S/2009/304](#) and [A/67/499-S/2012/746](#)).
6. The Security Council adopted its first stand-alone resolution on security sector reform in 2014: resolution [2151 \(2014\)](#). It was unanimously adopted and sponsored by 41 Member States.

Developments since 2014

7. The adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has acknowledged the central role of effective, accountable and transparent institutions

in contributing to peace, justice, security and violence prevention. The review of the peacebuilding architecture and the adoption of twin resolutions thereon (General Assembly resolution [70/262](#) and Security Council resolution [2282 \(2016\)](#)) stressed that sustaining peace was imperative to preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.

8. At the regional level, new policy frameworks (developed by the Economic Community of West African States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) have increasingly stressed support for security sector governance as the focus of engagement, prompting the spread of the term “security sector governance and reform”.

9. Peace agreements signed since 2014 have increasingly contained comprehensive provisions on security sector governance and reform, including in South Sudan (in 2015 and 2018), Mali (in 2016), the Central African Republic (in 2019) and the Sudan (in 2020). Provisions related to transitional and long-term security governance arrangements are at the centre of national political processes and United Nations mediation efforts, including in Libya, Somalia and Yemen.

10. Recognizing the impact that coherent, predictable and transparent international assistance has on the success of national security sector reform efforts, international partners and donors have developed whole-of-system approaches to guide their security sector assistance.

11. Moreover, the World Bank has prioritized engagement with the security sector in the framework of the World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence 2020–2025.

12. In the context of improving the effectiveness of peace operations, the Secretary-General undertook independent reviews of peace operations that highlighted the role played by United Nations support for security sector governance and reform in advancing political solutions to conflict. He affirmed the role of the United Nations in supporting international coordination of such support (e.g. through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

13. It is also important to recognize, in the context of security sector governance and reform, the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the need for effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in peace processes, as doing so can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, as highlighted in Security Council resolution [2493 \(2019\)](#).

Gaps

14. In resolution [2151 \(2014\)](#), the Security Council provides a strong foundation for United Nations engagement in security sector governance and reform by outlining principles, highlighting linkages to other mandate areas and outlining some functions that the United Nations should perform in this area. Since the adoption of the resolution and in the context of the Action for Peacekeeping commitments and the prevention agenda of the Secretary-General, several gaps that have an impact on implementation and may require further consideration by the Council have been observed. These include:

(a) Security sector reform mandates often do not highlight security sector governance or inclusiveness and the participation of all segments of society in national reform processes. The Security Council could fill this gap by providing

guidance on the need for inclusive national agreements related to security sector governance when considering the deployment of good offices or mediation missions and the facilitation of political dialogue;

(b) The role of United Nations peace operations in supporting the coordination of international assistance for security sector governance and reform is not sufficiently linked to mandate priorities and lacks Security Council guidance on the principles and standards that should underpin such support;

(c) Experience has shown that the successful implementation of security sector governance and reform mandates requires whole-of-mission strategies that mainstream security sector-related engagement and support tasks across the different pillars of United Nations peace operations and presences on the ground. Security Council guidance on integrated assessments, whole-of-system coordination and support strategies and integrated reporting related to the security sector would fill a critical gap in current United Nations practice;

(d) Although Member States systematically integrate security sector reform into their national recovery, prevention and peacebuilding strategies and their national development plans, these reform efforts are severely underfunded. Many areas of security sector governance and reform are not eligible for official development assistance and therefore are not financed from the multilateral trust funds established by donors to support the implementation of national development plans. Consistently, national security sector governance and reform efforts are hampered by the lack of predictable, reliable and sustainable financing for the security sector;

(e) In terms of women and peace and security, the Security Council has, in its resolutions [2493 \(2019\)](#) and [1325 \(2000\)](#), highlighted the frequent underrepresentation of women in many formal processes and bodies related to the maintenance of international peace and security, the relatively low number of women in senior positions in political, peace and security-related national, regional and international institutions, the lack of adequate gender-sensitive humanitarian responses and support for women's leadership roles in these settings, the insufficient financing for women and peace and security, and the resulting detrimental impact on the maintenance of international peace and security. This is a further gap that needs to be addressed in the implementation of security sector governance and reform efforts.

Objective of the debate

15. Post-conflict peacebuilding and sustaining peace require an integrated effort to address the factors that have caused or are threatening to cause a conflict.

16. For the implementation of efforts to both build and sustain peace, security sector reform should be designed with careful consideration of issues such as the conflict or post-conflict environment, the relevant actors on the ground and the security threats (past, current and potential), including the root causes of the conflict, the history and nature of the conflict and the role of the security sector at the time in the conflict.

17. The high-level meeting is intended to draw linkages between security sector governance and reform, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, thus integrating the concept across all three pillars of the United Nations system. The meeting will offer an important opportunity to discuss the realignment of practices in the interest of peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

18. The meeting will also provide an opportunity for future support for security sector reform processes in both mission and non-mission settings.

Focus of the meeting

19. The meeting will be focused on:

(a) The need to adjust approaches to assistance for viable, sustainable security sector governance and reform;

(b) Bridging the gap between policy and practical implementation issues, in particular funding;

(c) The implementation of security sector governance and reform mandates with whole-of-mission strategies that mainstream security sector-related engagement and support tasks across the different pillars of United Nations peace operations and presences on the ground;

(d) Facilitating the full and effective participation of women in post-conflict situations, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, security sector and judicial reforms, and wider post-conflict reconstruction processes where these are mandated tasks within United Nations missions.

Guiding questions

20. Participants may wish to consider the following questions:

(a) How can the United Nations best support Member States to maintain stability throughout times of tension and ensure the protection of people from violence?

(b) How can cooperation with the host State be strengthened in areas of security sector reform, peacebuilding and sustaining peace?

(c) What are the main security-related activities that need to be carried out in a country-specific context?

(d) What challenges have Member States faced in supporting and ensuring broad and meaningful ownership by all segments of society, particularly women, including at the grass-roots level, of security sector reform, in contexts in which such reform priorities are articulated, among others, through peace agreements? What are some good practices and lessons?

(e) The African Union has increasingly taken the role of lead mediator and has facilitated negotiations on security sector reform provisions in political and peace processes. What lessons has it learned from that experience? What is the experience of African Union-United Nations cooperation in support of security sector reform, in the context of United Nations peace operations?

(f) While noting the support provided by bilateral and regional actors, the Security Council, in resolution [2151 \(2014\)](#), highlighted the importance of coordination and coherence of international support and the role of the United Nations. In relation to the Organization's performing its security sector reform coordination mandate, what lessons have emerged?

(g) Many areas of security sector governance and reform are not eligible for official development assistance and therefore are not financed from the multilateral trust funds established by donors to support the implementation of national development plans. How can this be addressed to ensure that such efforts at the national level receive predictable, reliable and sustainable financing?

Format of the meeting

21. The meeting will be held as a virtual ministerial-level debate on 3 December 2020, beginning at 8.30 a.m. (New York time).