During the month of March 2015, the PSC held a total of 8 meetings during which it considered a number of conflict situations and thematic issues. The Theme for the month was based on the Beijing Platform for Action Critical Area 3 focusing on Women and Armed Conflict.

At its 489th Meeting held on 3 March 2015, the PSC considered and adopted its Provisional Programme of Work for March 2015 and also adopted the decision on regional and international efforts to combat the Boko Haram Terrorist Group and the way forward: In this regard, Council recalled its earlier pronouncements on the threat posed by the Boko Haram terrorist group and efforts to address it, including its Communiqués adopted at its 469th and 484th meetings held on November 2014 and 29 January 2015 respectively.

Furthermore, Council, in terms of the power entrusted to it under Article 7 of the PSC Protocol and under the provisions of article 16 of the Protocol, endorsed the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) agreed upon at the Yaounde meeting of experts, with a view to facilitate the effective implementation of the mandate and tasks of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) launched by the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Benin and further requested the Commission to take all necessary steps towards the full operationalization of the MNJTF.

At its 490th Meeting held on 5 March 2015, Council received a briefing by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Burundi to the AU and the update provided by the Commission on the ongoing preparations towards the holding of the general elections in Burundi, scheduled to take place from 26 May 2015 to August 2015.

Council expressed its commitment to the respect of the sovereignty and independence of Burundi, in line with the AU Constitutive Act and the United Nations Charter and further called upon AU Member States, United Nations and the larger international community to provide all necessary financial and logistical support to Burundi, in order to facilitate
the holding of free, fair and transparent elections, in line with Africa and international standards.

At its 491st Meeting held on 9 March 2015, Council convened an Open Session on Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women, Children and other Vulnerable groups in Armed Conflicts in Africa and commemorated the International Women’s Day. The Open Session offered a grand opportunity for the PSC and AU Member States in general, regional actors, partners and civil society to strengthen their commitment for the promotion and protection of the rights of Women and Children in conflict situations in Africa, as provided for in AU’s international and regional policy and legal frameworks.

The objective of the Open Session was to take stock on the implementation status and indentify key challenges of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the decade for African Women, review the recommendations of past PSC open sessions on Women and Children in conflict situations, and assess the extent of their implementation, as well as map out the challenges and opportunities.

At its 492th Meeting held on 11 March 2015, the PSC finalized its preparations for the holding of the 9th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting with the UN Security Council which I had the honour to co-chair with the Permanent Representative of the French Republic to the UN in his capacity as President of the UNSC for March 2015. The Consultative Meeting was held in this specific room on 12 March 2015, as part of their regular dialogue in the framework of the African Union (AU) and United Nations Partnership.

The two Councils reaffirmed the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council for the maintenance of international Peace and Security under the Charter of the United Nations and the mandate of the Peace and Security Council with regard to the promotion of Peace and Security in Africa, as provided for in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as in the AU Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council.

The two sides reviewed matters of common concern, in particular the conflicts and crisis situations in Africa, such as in Eastern DRC and the Great Lakes Region where concern remains regarding the continuing destabilization activities by the FDLR and other negative forces.
On combating the **Boko Haram Terrorist Group**, the two sides strongly condemned the horrendous attacks committed by Boko Haram, including killings of civilians, use of women and children as suicide bombers, kidnappings, hostage taking, pillaging and destruction of civilian property, sexually-based violence and other abuses.

The two sides took note of the AUPSC Communiqué of 3 March 2015 on Boko Haram, as well as of the letter by the Chairperson of the Commission conveying same and the Concept of Operations of the MNJTF to the UN Secretary-General and, through him, to the UNSC, for information and action.

On the situation in **Mali and the Sahel**, the two sides commended the Algerian Government and the members of the international mediation team comprising the countries of the region, as well as the AU, ECOWAS, the UN, the EU and the OIC, for their efforts to resolve the conflict in Mali and welcomed the initialing on 1 March 2015, of the “Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali by the Government of Mali, Movement of the “Algiers Platform” and all members of the Mediation Team. They urged the Coordination of “Azawad Movement” that has not yet initialed the document to do so without further delay.

The two Councils reaffirmed their commitment to Peace, Security and Socio-economic development in the Sahel region and stressed the need for a coordinated approach in the rapid implementation of the AU Strategies for the Sahel Region.

With regard to **Libya**, the two sides expressed deep concern at the prevailing security situation and the continued terrorist acts in the country, as well as the resulting humanitarian crisis and violation of human rights and international humanitarian law.

They acknowledged the important role of the countries of the Region, through the Ministerial Committee of the neighborhood; commended all efforts aimed at facilitating the convening of a reconciliation conference that will bring together all relevant Libyan stakeholders; welcomed the establishment of the International Contact Group for Libya; and underlined the Group’s critical and important role in coordinating International engagement in Libya.
On Darfur, the two Councils expressed deep concern at the security and humanitarian situation there, including through continued clashes between Government forces and rebel armed groups; an escalation of inter-tribal fighting and other local clashes, including the involvement of paramilitary units and tribal militias and an increase in criminality and banditry, all of which have resulted in substantial displacement of civilian population.

They commended UNAMID for its efforts towards the stabilization of the situation and its proactive protection of civilians, as well as support to humanitarian personnel in order to facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable civilian population in Darfur and reiterated their support to the efforts being deployed by the AU High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan (AUHIP) with the support of the AU-UN Joint Chief Mediator and the UN Special Envoy for South Sudan and Sudan, to facilitate an immediate cessation of hostilities in Darfur that would pave the way for the participation of the Darfuri armed movement in the national dialogue announced by the Sudanese authorities in January 2014.

On Somalia, the two sides noted with satisfaction the significant progress achieved in Somalia despite the many remaining challenges. They commended AMISOM and Somali security forces for having successfully conducted a number of operations, which resulted in the recovery of several strategic locations and further weakening of Al Shabaab.

They called on the Government and other Somali stakeholders to expedite their efforts to ensure the conduct of credible elections in 2016, including the adoption of the new constitution.

On South Sudan, the two sides noted with utmost disappointment the failure by the South Sudanese parties to reach an agreement, by the deadline of 5 March 2015, at the last round of the IGAD-led peace talks in Addis Ababa, which had been convened to complete consultations on the outstanding matters to end the tragedy unfolding in their country.

They welcomed the call by the Chair of IGAD to further enhance the mediation process, in close consultation with the other leaders of the region, the AU, and the UN, and expressed their readiness to support this process and to support the people of South Sudan to achieve their legitimate aspirations for lasting peace, stability and national reconciliation.
Regarding the **Review of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations**, the two Councils noted with satisfaction the African Union’s increased contribution to the maintenance of peace and security, including peacekeeping operations in response to conflict situations in various parts of the continent while acknowledging the challenges faced by the AU-led peace support operations relating to funding and logistical gaps.

They welcomed the initiative by the UN Secretary General, to establish a High Level Independent Panel to undertake the review and stressed the importance of this review for all regions, in particular for the African Continent, which continues to host the largest numbers of peacekeeping operations and also took note, in this regard, of the consultation conducted by the Panel from 9 to 13 February 2015, with the Chairperson of the AU Commission as well as the AUPSC.

At its **494th Meeting** held on 24 March 2015, the PSC received a briefing by Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, Chairperson of the Special Envoy of the IGAD to **South Sudan** as well as Statements made by the Representative of the Government of South Sudan, regarding developments on the crisis in that country and also on the situation prevailing in the **Abyei** area and the evolution of the related international efforts.

The PSC decided to enhance and scale up its support to IGAD and its mediation efforts in South Sudan, including consultations with the leaders of the region regarding the composition of the AU High-Level Ad-Hoc Committee of Heads of State and Government, comprising one representative from each of the five regions, established pursuant to the Communiqué adopted at its 474th meeting held on 5 December 2014, which will strengthen Africa’s support to IGAD and assist the South Sudanese parties and stakeholders to achieve durable peace in their country.

As a result of concern expressed during successive meetings of the relevant African Union policy organs at the lack of progress in the search for a solution to the conflict situation in **Western Sahara**, the PSC at its **496th Meeting** held on 27 March 2015, took note of the report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the situation in **Western Sahara** and an update provided by the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the Commission for Western Sahara, Former President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique as well as a Statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). An invitation was also extended to the Kingdom of Morocco but unfortunately they did not show-up.
In recalling the Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.758 (XX11) in which it requested the Commission “to take all necessary measures for the organization of a referendum for the Self-determination of the People of Western Sahara, in compliance with the relevant decision of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN) resolutions”, the PSC noted with deep concern that indeed, four decades after the onset of the conflict in Western Sahara and fifty years after the decision to decolonize Western Sahara, all efforts aimed at finding a solution have so far failed to achieve the expected results and that the prevailing stalemate not only heightens tension in the territory, but also undermines efforts to promote integration in the Maghreb Region. Council therefore, expressed the urgency of renewed efforts to overcome the current impasse and in this respect:

(i) **Appealed** for an enhanced and coordinated international action towards the early organization of a referendum for the self-determination of the People of Western Sahara, in compliance with relevant OAU/AU decisions and UN resolutions.

(ii) **Urged** the UNSC to take all necessary decisions to ensure progress in the search for a solution to the conflict in Western Sahara, acknowledged its critical role and primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In this respect, encourage the UN Security Council, at its forthcoming April 2015 meeting on Western Sahara, to give serious consideration to the recommendation contained in the report of the UN Secretary-General of 10 April 2014, for a comprehensive review of the framework it provided for the negotiating process in April 2007, should no progress occur before April 2015, on the understanding that such a review should aim at facilitating the early holding of the referendum for the self-determination of the People of Western Sahara.

(iii) **Renewed its support** to the calls made by the UN Security Council for direct negotiation between the two Parties, namely the Kingdom of Morocco and Frente POLISARIO, without preconditions and in good faith, with a view to achieve a just lasting and mutually acceptable political solution; and
(iv) **Appealed** to the larger international community to lend its full support to the efforts aimed to overcoming the current impasse.

Taking into account that Western Sahara remains an issue in the completion of the decolonization process of Africa, Council decided the following:

(i) To activate the Ad Hoc Committee of Heads of State and Government on the conflict in Western Sahara, established pursuant to resolution AHG/Res.92 (xv), adopted at the 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU, held in Khartoum, Sudan, from 18 to 22 July 1978;

(ii) To expand the composition of the Ad Hoc Committee to comprise ten Heads of State and Government, two from each of the five regions of the Continent;

(iii) To establish an international Contact Group for Western Sahara (ICG-WS), in order to keep the issue on the international agenda and to mobilize the necessary support for the early resolution of the conflict;

(iv) Requested the Chairperson of the Commission to urgently undertake the necessary consultations to this end.