BRIEFING NOTE ON A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMBAT THE TRANSNATIONAL THREAT OF TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA
I. INTRODUCTION

1. Terrorism remains a serious threat to Africa’s stability and development. The past year has witnessed some of the deadliest terrorist attacks on the African continent, impacting nearly all regions. The threat is increasingly manifesting itself in a combination of small to large scale attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as open armed confrontations between terrorist groups and states’ security institutions. Global security developments are also shaping and amplifying the threat of terrorism in Africa. Terrorism have had a devastating impact across the continent, with hundreds killed or maimed, thousands displaced, and livelihoods severely disrupted with serious humanitarian and food security consequences, and economic activity disrupted in the affected areas.

2. The present report is submitted to inform the deliberations of the 749th meeting of Peace and Security Council (PSC) on preventing and combating the transnational threat of terrorism and violent extremism. It provides an update on the current trends of the terrorism threat, as well as on the efforts undertaken at the continental and regional levels to address this scourge. The report concludes with observations and recommendations on the way forward.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE THREAT OF TERRORISM IN AFRICA

3. The year 2017 has witnessed devastating terrorist attacks in different parts of Africa. On 24 November 2017, 311 worshippers were killed in the attack on a mosque in the north of Egypt. Six weeks before this attack, on 14 October 2017, another 512 people were killed in Mogadishu, Somalia. This attack was unprecedented in terms of scale and impact in Somalia’s history. In Nigeria, and between late November and December 2017 alone, an estimated 100 lives were lost in separate suicide attacks on mosques and markets. The use of children as suicide bombers represents the worst of the excesses committed by terrorist groups over the past years. Besides the afore-mentioned attacks, terrorist groups have claimed responsibility for several others of varying targets and lethality with the aim of instilling fear, creating confusion and exhausting the already limited capacities of states institutions to prevent and respond to attacks.

4. In North and West Africa, and the Sahel region more broadly, several terrorist groups remain active, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates; Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) in Mali and Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade in Tunisia. The so-called Islamic State (IS) has also expanded its reach by co-opting preexisting terrorist groups, including Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya and Tunisia, and factions
of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat to stability and state building in Somalia and the Horn of Africa more broadly. Elements of the group, notably the foreign fighters, have pledged allegiance to IS under the leadership of Abdulqadir Mumin, who remains restricted to Puntland. In Central Africa, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), which has been severely degraded by the onslaught of Regional Cooperation Initiative against the Lord’s Resistance Army (RCI-LRA), is operating at a very low scale in an effort to maintain its survival.

a. **Foreign terrorists and returning African fighters**

5. It is important to note that terrorist groups in Africa, while driven primarily by a local agenda, have nevertheless drew inspiration from, and colluded with, groups that exist beyond the continent as evidenced by the mergers of AQIM with other local groups and the declaration by the IS of so-called “provinces” in Libya, Egypt and Nigeria. These dynamics are now having serious ramifications on the continent. While IS being driven out of Iraq and Syria, the group is seeking to make the continent, and particularly North Africa and the Sahel region, its new frontier.

6. Thousands of returning Africans and relocating foreign terrorist fighters coming into the continent pose a serious security threat that many African states are ill-prepared to confront. The existence of other terrorist organizations, which have already pledged allegiance to IS in the continent, makes it a conducive option as a receiving ground for the fighters. Furthermore, the existence of vast “ungoverned spaces” in Africa, especially in the Sahelo-Saharan region, where government control is weak, particularly in the border regions, increases the continent’s susceptibility to receiving foreign terrorist fighters.

7. The category that puts the continent more at risk is that of individuals holding passports of western countries who would ordinarily receive visas on arrival in most African countries. This adds to the challenge of uncovering the identity of returning foreign fighters, tracking them and assessing the risk they pose. Indeed it is not possible to detect intent, and yet there are those with intentions of conducting attacks in their home countries or elsewhere. This adds to the complexity of determining an appropriate response that will protect the public from harm.

b. **Financing of terrorism and links with transnational organized crime**

8. Transnational organized crime poses a growing threat to continental and global security. Expanding networks and diverse criminal activities are resulting in the convergence of threats. There is increasing evidence that terrorists are turning to transnational organized crime networks to generate funding and acquire logistical support to carry out their violent acts. It is noted that while the links between terrorism and transnational crime may be considered opportunistic, this nexus is nonetheless a cause of deep concern as it complicates response measures.
9. The links between terrorism and transnational crime have manifested in different ways. In the Sahel region, during the surge in the crime of kidnap-for-ransom, terrorist groups relied on criminal networks to abduct foreigners on their behalf or serve as middlemen in ransom negotiations. Criminals have also shown a tendency to align with or join terrorist groups to gain access to human and drug trafficking routes, and expand their networks. This nexus is of significant concern especially in light of the current migration situation in Libya. The insecurity in Libya is creating safe havens for terrorist groups to operate with almost complete impunity, while at the same time offering them an opportunity to make alliances in order to profit from or to tax the smuggling and trafficking trade perpetuated by armed groups and criminal networks in the region.

10. In the Horn of Africa, Al-Shabaab finances its operations through various criminal activities, including extortion and sophisticated taxation systems levied on local businesses. Furthermore, al-Shabaab charges fees and taxes on contraband trade carried out by criminal networks in the areas under its control. In Central Africa, the elephant poaching has provided a lifeline for the LRA’s depleted force. The illicit trade in ivory has been enabled by wide and intricate transnational organized criminal networks that span several countries in the region, as well as countries beyond the continent.

11. Another link between terrorism and transnational organized crime that applies in almost all regions of the continent, is the illicit supply of weapons and ammunition. Whether, armaments are diverted from legal stockpiles or traded illicitly across continents, they ultimately make their way to terrorist groups through organized criminal syndicates that operate regionally and globally.

c. **The use of the internet for terrorist purposes**

12. Cyberspace continues to increasingly dominate and control individual lives of the citizens on the continent, and globally, including corporate and state institutions. It, therefore, follows that it will also continue to attract the attention of terrorists, violent extremists and organized criminal networks, posing enormous implications for human and state security. Vulnerable youth, including in the diaspora, are being recruited to join terrorist groups through the Internet, where such groups post elaborate messages that appeal to disenfranchised youth. In addition to recruitment, radicalization and incitement to terrorism through the Internet have also contributed to the commission of terrorist acts by un-affiliated individuals where terrorist groups seek to inspire and incite acts of violence.

13. Another issue of major concern relates to terrorist training through the internet. This includes the online dissemination of the know-how in guerilla fighting methods and the making of Improvised Explosive Devises (IEDs), as well as other forms of weapons, such as radiological dispersal devises. This allows terrorist groups and operatives, regardless of their capabilities, to develop expertise to further wreak havoc and destruction.
III. CONTINENTAL AND REGIONAL EFFORTS TO PREVENT AND COMBAT TERRORISM

14. Over the years, there have been commendable efforts at the national and regional levels. The progress made by African Union (AU) Peace Support Operations and ad-hoc security coalitions have significantly degraded the capabilities of terrorist groups. At the national level, the criminal justice response to terrorism have been strengthened with the adoption of anti-terrorism legislation and the enhanced capacities of law enforcement agencies. There are also growing efforts by Member States to better understand and address the political, social and economic conditions conducive to the spread of violent ideologies. Several member States have also developed integrated tools and programs to deal with returning foreign terrorist fighters and disengaged combatants which include prosecution, rehabilitation and reconciliation.

15. The AU, through the efforts of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the RCI-LRA and the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the Boko Haram terrorist groups, have significantly degraded the capabilities of terrorist groups in Somalia, the Sahel region and Central Africa. The AU’s institutions have also continued to build capacities of intelligence services, law enforcement agencies and other institutions to prevent and combat terrorism in line with the AU instruments and frameworks. These institutions include the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), and most recently the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL).

16. The ACSRT has conducted various capacity building initiatives during the course of 2017, with a focus on building the capacities of first responders from law enforcement agencies and civil society on countering violent extremism and radicalization. It has also partnered with other regional and international bodies on building the skills and capacities required by religious leaders to play a constructive role in promoting tolerance and preventing radicalization in religious education, and also enabled participants to review the teaching of religion in schools. In consultation with the national and regional focal points designated by Member States and Regional Economic Communities, the ACSRT adopted the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan at the 11th annual meeting of Focal Points held from 17 to 19 December 2017 in Algiers.

17. On its part, the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) undertook various initiatives to support the efforts of the Member States to prevent and combat terrorism. It held Workshop on the “Phenomena of Mercenarism, Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), Rogue Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and their Impact on the Security and Stability in Africa,” from 2 to 6 April 2017 in Khartoum, and on “Free Movement of People, its Challenges and Prospects in Africa,” from 26 to 28 May 2017 in Kigali. The workshops resulted in adoption of recommendations for implementation by national intelligence services.
18. CISSA also held its 14th annual ordinary session in September 2017, in Khartoum, under the theme that centred on comprehensive partnership in combating terrorism. The conference generated consensus among intelligence services on strategic partnership to help in countering terrorism through exchange of information, training and mutual legal assistance, extradition and also to avoid duplication overlapping and rivalry among the various partners.

19. The Commission has also made progress in the operationalization of the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL). Following the formal opening of the Secretariat in Algiers, Algeria in July 2017, AFRIPOL has been able to undertake capacity building workshops on Transnational Organized Crime, Cybercrime and Terrorism on 24 to 25 October 2017, and on Enhanced Cooperation in Combating Cybercrime, on 13 and 14 December 2017. The meetings enabled identification of priorities in combating transnational organized crime, cybercrime at national, regional and continental levels.

20. The Nouakchott and Djibouti Processes for Enhancing Security Cooperation in the Sahel and Eastern Africa regions, established under the auspices of the AU, have served as a catalyst for robust cooperation between the intelligence services of the countries of the respective regions. The processes have allowed different institutions to develop a shared understanding of the common security threats and devise collaborative response measures to address them. The forums have also served as a confidence building measure among intelligence services. Given regional and global political and security developments and the common threats facing these two regions, the Commission convened a joint meeting of the heads of intelligence and security services of the Member States participating in both processes, on 10 November 2017, in Addis Ababa.

21. In order to consolidate the gains made by the MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin, the Commission partnered with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in organizing a regional stabilization conference on areas affected by Boko Haram, from 2 to 4 November 2017 in Ndjamena, Chad. The conference concluded with a number of action points, including enhancing the humanitarian response to victims of Boko Haram, early recovery to encourage the return of displaced persons, restoration of state institutions and handling of disengaged combatants.

22. Furthermore, steady progress has been made in operationalizing the AU Special Fund for Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa pursuant to the decisions Assembly/AU/Dec.614 (XXVII) and Assembly/AU/Dec.627(XXVIII) adopted by the 27th and 28th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held respectively in July 2016 and January 2017. The draft Statute of the Fund was considered by the 10th Ordinary Meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security (STCDSS) which decided to transmit it onwards to the Specialized Technical Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs for further consideration.

IV. OBSERVATIONS ON THE CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE
23. Despite their multitude, continental efforts have remained fragmented, military-oriented and incommensurate with the scale of the threat. Significant gaps persist at all levels. The continued political instability and absence of law and order in different regions of the continent have provided an ideal environment for terrorist groups to grow and operate.

24. Generally, the criminal justice response to terrorism remains weak. There are persistent capacity constraints facing law enforcement agencies, including border control, and the courts to successfully investigate and prosecute terrorism cases, as well as rehabilitate and reform convicted perpetrators. While Member States have expressed strong commitment to fighting impunity, courts in many states are overwhelmed and unable to deal with the load of persons disengaged from terrorist groups in a timely and effective manner. Moreover, and despite the urgency, responses to the threat of returning foreign terrorist fighters remains ad-hoc and poorly coordinated.

25. Many African states have not criminalized the acts of recruitment and incitement to commit terrorist acts, and the glorification of terrorist acts, in line with regional and international instruments. This gap is further exacerbated by the fact that the criminal justice system as a whole does not possess the technical capabilities to prevent, investigate and prosecute cases of on-line terrorist recruitment or incitement to commit terrorist acts.

26. Political and structural factors are also undermining the role of the intelligence community in countering terrorism, as well as the resulting absence of collaboration with the criminal justice system, both nationally and regionally. Additionally, and while the Nouakchott and Djibouti Processes have consistently adopted strong conclusions and action points, these remain largely unimplemented. The Focal Points mechanism established under the ACSRT’s auspices has operated sub-optimally due to poor levels and quality of information sharing.

27. Significant gaps exist in national and regional efforts to counter terrorist financing, particularly due to the poor functioning of Financial Intelligence Units and other regulatory frameworks, as well as poor border management capacities to prevent and interdict illicit trafficking.

28. While critical gains have been made by ongoing military operations, efforts to consolidate and sustain the gains have lagged behind. These include adequate humanitarian responses, early recovery initiatives and restoration of law, order and economic activity. It must be stressed that stabilization efforts must address the conditions that gave rise to terrorism and violent extremism. Simply restoring the social, political and economic structures to pre-conflict levels will not form a sustainable solution in the long-term.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD
29. The Commission stresses the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach that focuses on prevention and addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, integrated security and law-enforcement responses, and sustainable post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. These integrated and mutually reinforcing components are outlined in the landmark communique adopted by the 455th meeting of the Peace and Security Council, held at the level of Heads of States and Government, on 2 September 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya.

30. In furtherance of this approach, the Commission convened a high-level forum, on 10-11 December 2017 in Oran, under the theme “Effective and Sustainable Counterterrorism Responses: A Regional Approach”. Senior officials at the meeting acknowledged that shortcomings in preventing and combating terrorism and violent extremism on the continent are not due to the shortage of guiding principles and frameworks, but rather, were a result of the absence of a strong political will and effective action at the national level. In this regard, they recognized that there are no alternatives to nationally owned, led and financed efforts to achieve meaningful and effective action. The senior officials also stressed the need for regional and sub-regional approaches to preventing and countering terrorism that strengthens cooperation, takes into consideration the particular context of the respective states and enshrines human rights principles. The Commission thus urges Member States, through the Council, to commit to implementing the conclusions of the Oran High-Level Forum.

31. On its part, and in addressing the priority issues, the Commission will launch a process to assist Member States to develop a harmonized rule-of-law based approach to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and returning African fighters. The Commission will also expedite the process for establishing the African List of Persons, Groups and Entities Involved in Terrorist Acts, as outlined in the 2002 AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism.

32. The Commission will ensure the timely implementation of the call made by the Council, at its 687th meeting held in Addis Ababa on the 23 May 2017, to the ACSRT, AFRIPOL and CISSA to work with partners and other stakeholders towards developing a 5-year strategic roadmap for the prevention and combating of terrorism and violent extremism.

33. Finally, a comprehensive approach to countering the transnational threat of terrorism and violent extremism should include strenuous measures and steps in socio-economic development throughout the continent in order to stem out some of the underlying conditions that fuel the scourge of terrorism.