SESSION II: Presentation on the African Union Reforms

I. Background

The institutional reforms of the African Union (AU) have gained significant prominence in recent years within the framework of promoting regional integration and strengthening African collective action. Africa has witnessed significant changes over the past two decades on several fronts which has made reforming the AU more urgent than ever before.

These include changes to Africa’s peace and security landscape and the emergence of new challenges such as an increase in organized crime, terrorism and forced migration. On the other hand, remarkable economic growth rates have provided a strong foundation for promoting structural transformation and the implementation of an ambitious continental strategy for socio-economic transformation - Agenda 2063. The aspirations of Agenda 2063 derive from a truly inclusive approach driven by the voices of African people.

The challenges, opportunities and new realities facing Africa have made it essential to strengthen the capacity of the continent’s regional and sub-regional organizations, particularly the AU, in order that they can adequately support African countries’ peace, security and sustainable development objectives. Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of African institutions is imperative, particularly as Africa seeks to drive its own agenda and assume greater responsibility and ownership in dealing with African problems.

In this context, African countries embarked on the implementation of a bold reform process to make the AU more efficient and financially self-sufficient. Significant progress has been made so far in the formulation and implementation of the AU institutional and financial reform agenda.

In January 2017, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, who led a review of the AU in 2016, presented his “Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union”. The report recommended actions in the following four areas aimed at making the AU more relevant and fit for purpose:

1. Enable the AU to finance itself in the long-term;
2. Focus the organization on key priorities with continental scope (peace and security; political affairs; economic integration; and Africa’s voice and representation in global affairs) and to empower Regional Economic Communities to take the lead on regional issues;
3. Realign AU institutions to deliver against those priorities that can make a real difference to Africa; and
4. Manage the business of the AU effectively in both political and operational terms.

Building on the recommendations of the report, African leaders adopted important decisions during their summits in 2017 and 2018, including on the financing of the AU and its Peace Fund. Furthermore, an extraordinary summit on the AU reform agenda, expected to focus on reaching a consensus among African countries on issues such as the financing of the AU and the division of labour between the AU Commission and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), will be held in November 2018.

II. Objectives

This session in the 2018 Africa Dialogue Series will provide a platform to discuss the ongoing process of the AU reforms. The aim is to take stock of the progress made so far, reach a greater understanding of the ongoing reform process and discuss how it could be better supported by African countries and Africa’s strategic partners, particularly the UN.

III. Guiding questions

I. What is the current state of the ongoing institutional and financial reform of the AU and what are the key barriers impeding the reform process?

II. In light of the strategic partnership between the AU and the UN, and their exemplary model of cooperation in line with Chapter 8 of the UN Charter (as demonstrated by the two joint frameworks on peace and security and development), what impact does the ongoing reform of the UN have on the reform of the AU?

III. How can the UN support the AU reform effort to contribute to an efficient and responsive AU that is “fit for purpose”?

IV. In what ways will the reform help to enhance the role of the AU within the global multilateral system?