



Governance, Peace & Security

Newsletter

Fifth edition, Jan- Mar 2025

Introduction

Our mission to advance the peace and security agenda in the COMESA region is anchored on Article 3(d) of the COMESA Treaty, whereby the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) Programme strives towards the promotion of regional peace, security, and stability. This third edition of our newsletter chronicles various activities implemented in the first quarter of 2025 (Q1-2025) whilst underscoring the key achievements and the outcomes realised – encompassing a wide range of efforts, from strengthened democracy and institutional capacities to dynamic youth engagement.

This edition covers the following thematic areas:

1. **The 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union**
2. **Democracy and Governance**
3. **Early Warning**
4. **Transnational Organised Crime**
5. **Youth Engagement**

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The 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union

The 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 17th – 18th February 2025 with COMESA participating. This Summit addressed critical issues such as AU Commission leadership elections, peace and security, continental integration, and global partnerships.

Held under the theme "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations," the Summit set a bold tone for discussions on historical injustices and pathways to reconciliation. In a landmark decision, the Assembly elected new AU leadership, with Mahmoud Ali Youssouf of Djibouti assuming the role of AUC Chairperson, supported by Algeria's Salma Malika Haddadi as Deputy Chairperson.

Peace and security remained high on the agenda, with the Assembly endorsing vital initiatives to address ongoing conflicts in Eastern DRC, Somalia, Sudan, and Libya. The Summit also advanced continental integration, adopting key AfCFTA legal instruments and launching the Pan-

African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) to facilitate trade across the continent.

On the global stage, the AU reaffirmed its support for South Africa's G20 presidency and prepared for upcoming high-level engagements, including the Africa-EU and Africa-Japan Summits. Meanwhile, the Summit's sidelines were abuzz with strategic meetings, such as AGA-APSA platform discussions and an Inter-REC CEOs gathering aimed at strengthening regional coordination.

In a strong display of regional unity, COMESA and SADC jointly endorsed Dr. Samuel Munzele Maimbo's candidacy for the African Development Bank presidency. The Summit concluded on a high note with COMESA and the African Peer Review Mechanism signing an MoU, reinforcing their shared commitment to human rights, good governance, and democracy across Africa.

The 9th Annual Continental Forum of Election Management Bodies (EMBS)



“Elections are at the heart of democracy. When conducted with integrity, they allow citizens to have a voice in how and by whom they are governed..” Kofi Annan

COMESA_GPS participated in the 9th Annual Continental Forum of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) from 12th to 13th March 2025 in Accra, Ghana. It was convened by the African Union Peace and Security Department in collaboration with the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA) and the support of the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES). Under the theme, “All Votes Count: Addressing the Problem of

Invalid or Rejected Ballots in Africa”, the forum sought to discuss and address the increasing incidence of invalid or rejected ballots in elections throughout the continent – which are notably above the global average. Moreover, it aimed to explore appropriate responses and recommendations for addressing the issues of invalid or rejected votes.

The Forum emphasised peer learning and actionable strategies to reduce ballot spoilage. Discussions centered on systemic flaws in voting procedures, voter education gaps, and technological shortcomings. Ghana’s Electoral Commission shared case studies showing how unclear ballot designs and inadequate voter training led to nearly 8% of rejected votes in recent polls, while Malawi’s EMB highlighted successes with biometric voter verification systems.

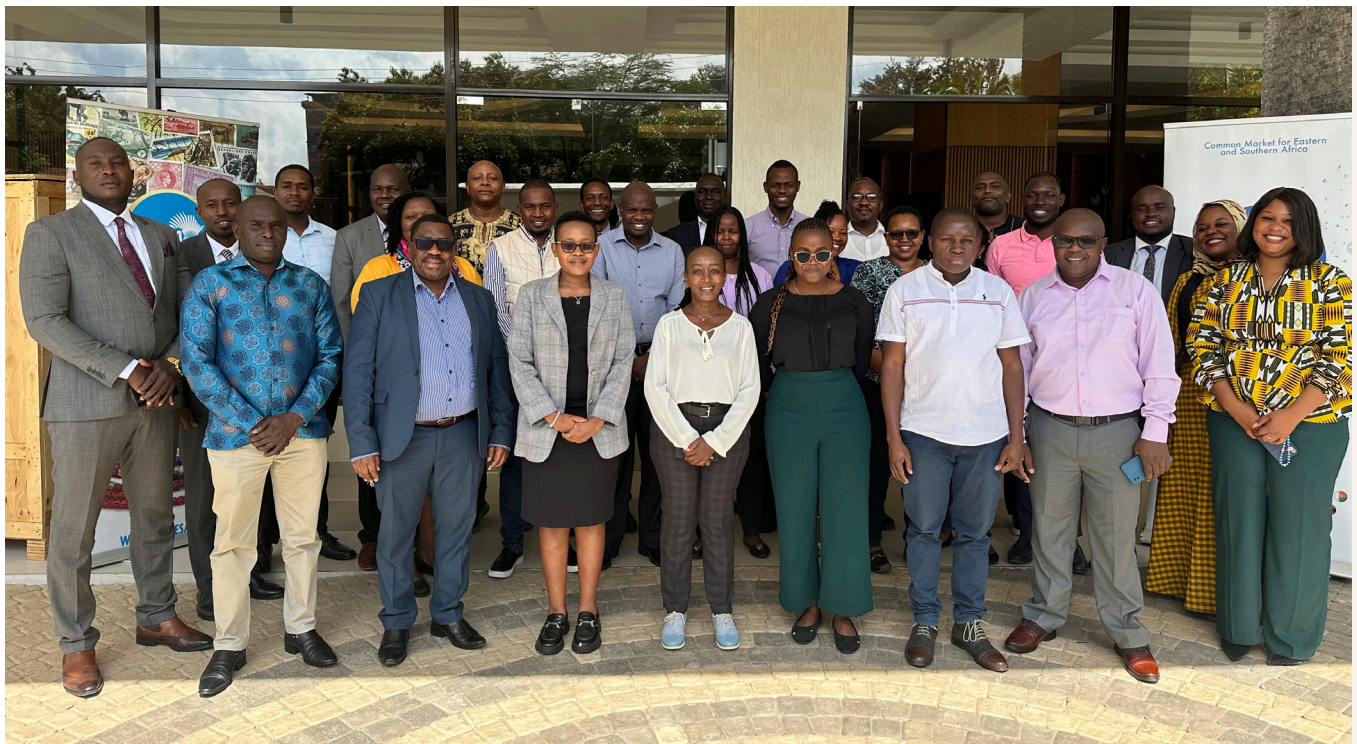
Two key recommendations emanated from the forum:



Leverage the use of modern technology, especially the voting machines, as a way of minimising rejected or spoilt ballots and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process



More focus on civic and voter education to ensure voters are aware of their civic rights and are appropriately oriented on the voting procedures



Training of Trainers' Workshop on the COMWARN SVAS and AU CSVRA/CSVMS for the Kenyan SVA/CSVRA

On 26 – 28 February 2025 in Machakos, Kenya, COMESA directed its efforts towards training the Kenya SVA/CSVRA Bureau on the COMWARN Structural Vulnerability Assessments (SVAs) and the AU Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA)/Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy. The workshop served as a refresher training in a bid to enhance the understanding of the Kenya Bureau and enhance preparedness for the SVA/ CSVRA process for Kenya earmarked for 2025. COMESA's facilitation efforts were complemented by support from the African Union Continental Early Warning System (AU

CEWS), East African Community Early Warning System (EACWARN) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). They presented on the numerous conflict prevention methodologies, shared experience on the conduct of national assessments in the region, as well as contributed to the discussions on the Kenya CSVRA roadmap.

At the conclusion of the workshop, a revised roadmap for the Kenya CSVRA/CSVMS process was drafted and follow-up actions were mutually agreed:-



Kenya SVA Bureau to share the revised roadmap with COMESA and AU.



Kenya SVA Bureau to brief policymakers on the CSVRA process – including the proposed roadmap.



Kenya Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs to officially write to the AU and COMESA on the progress made and the next step in the implementation of the CSVRA process.



Kenya Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs to invite the Kenya Council of Governors for a meeting which will be supported by COMESA and partners.



Training Workshop for The Eastern Africa Civil Society Network (ECONET)

A training workshop for the Eastern Africa Civil Society Network (ECONet), held on 9 – 11 March 2025 in Entebbe, Uganda, presented the perfect opportunity for COMESA_GPS to support Civil Society Organizations in establishing and strengthening early warning systems. With the collaborative efforts of IGAD, GIZ, WANEP, and UNITAR, the training focused on orienting ECONet members on their newly established Early Warning System and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Early Warning and Conflict Prevention.

Experience-sharing sessions and discussions on the ECONet's governance structure dominated the workshop. Additionally, COMESA_GPS had the opportunity to highlight the architecture of the COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN), the importance of structural conflict prevention, and to refine numerous indicators utilised in the ECONet Early Warning System to align with COMWARN's interests.

Two major outcomes emerged from the workshop, namely:-



Official handover of the system by
GIZ to ECONet



Official handover of tablets to
ECONet by WANEP - to be
used for field data collection
and uploading data into the
ECONet database

Supporting Eswatini to Join The Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs)



In a bid to facilitate Eswatini's membership to the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units, a five-day meeting was hosted at the headquarters of the Eswatini Financial Intelligence Centre (EFIC) in Mbabane from 17 to 21 February 2025. It was supported by COMESA's Governance, Peace, and Security Programme following an official request from EFIC. The meeting focused on finalising Phase 3 of Eswatini's Egmont Group accession process. Key attendees included EFIC's Acting Director and technical staff, representatives from Malawi's Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA) and South Africa's FIC (who are Eswatini's Egmont sponsors), and a representative from COMESA.

The meeting concluded with sponsors confirming the successful completion of Phase 3, paving way for Phase 4 – an onsite assessment scheduled for 12 to 16 May 2025. This next phase will consist of consultations with Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and institutions involved in Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Countering Financing of Terrorism (CFT) and Countering Proliferation Financing (CPF).

The way forward included the following:

Final review by EFIC of the completed Egmont Membership Criteria (MCT) template and submission by EFIC sponsors by 23rd of February 2025 to Egmont.

Official communication by the EFIC sponsors to Egmont on the onsite visit scheduled for May 2025.



Capacity Building of Youth on the Development and Implementation of National Action Plans on Youth, Peace and Security: Southern Africa Region

In its continuous efforts to empower youth through peace and security initiatives, COMESA_GPS, in partnership with the African Union, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and Women Lead Africa convened a transformative workshop in Gaborone, Botswana, from 4 to 6 March, 2025. The workshop drew the participation of 52 young leaders from 10 Southern African countries, and sought to bolster their involvement in developing and implementing National Action Plans (NAPs) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS). The workshop served as a catalyst for change, aiming to localise and domesticate existing YPS frameworks, including the UN Security Council Resolutions and the Continental Framework on YPS. Participants gained invaluable insights into the AU Guidelines for the development of NAPs and the current status of implementation across the region. COMESA used the platform in disseminating the guidelines to establish and revamp National Youth Councils. The guidelines were approved by the COMESA Policy Organs in 2024.

However, the road to progress is not without hurdles. Countries reported challenges such as limited funding, lack of clear roadmaps, and insufficient youth engagement in peace processes. Malawi and Zimbabwe, the pioneers of NAP development in the Southern Africa region, shared

their experiences, highlighting similar obstacles but offering valuable recommendations to their peers.

The workshop culminated in a series of commitments and recommendations, including the integration of peace and security studies into educational curricula, leveraging on existing frameworks, and ensuring inclusivity in the implementation of NAPs. Participants also emphasised the need for continuous capacity building and improved partner responsiveness to youth initiatives.

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“The youth agenda is not a box-ticking strategy. It is a development, gender, human rights, peace and security issue that will require the implementation of intentional national strategies and structures in order to be effective..”
ACCORD

Commemorating Zambia Youth Day



On 12 March 2025, COMESA_GPS participated in the commemoration of the Zambia Youth Day held at the Mulungushi International Conference Center in Lusaka. The event brought together young people from the legal fraternity to review the 1986 Zambia National Youth Development Council (NYDC) Act. Convened by Restless Development and Girls Gone Political, the event served as a crucial platform for COMESA to showcase its regional scope and youth-centric initiatives. The youth were enlightened about COMESA's expansive mandate and role in fostering peace, security, and stability across the region as well as the myriad

opportunities available through its youth programmes.

COMESA presented its Guidelines for Establishing Effective National Youth Councils. These guidelines provided invaluable insights to the participants, offering a blueprint for revitalising the NYDC's legal framework and operational strategies. The commemoration culminated in several significant outcomes, including a clear roadmap for advocating for the proposed reforms, enhanced awareness of the NYDC's potential in championing youth-centered leadership, and a more informed youth populace on COMESA's regional peace and security mandate and role.

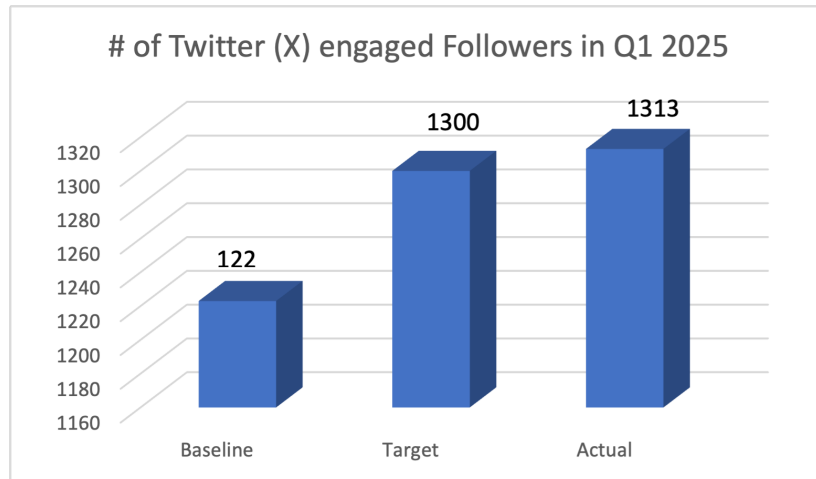
Madagascar Member of the Committee of Elders Passes on

It is with profound sadness that COMESA learned of the demise of Madam Monique Andreas Esoavelomandroso, a distinguished member of the COMESA Committee of Elders from Madagascar. She departed on 17 March 2025, in her home country. Appointed to the Committee in 2021, Madam Esoavelomandroso was known for her active participation and dedicated service to COMESA. Her impressive career, including serving as Madagascar's Minister of Decentralization and Development of Autonomous Provinces (2002-2005) and as Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission until 2008, has been an inspiration to Madagascar and the region at large. Her expertise in conflict resolution was evident in her roles as a mediator during Madagascar's political crisis in 2009 and as a member of the conflict resolution team for the 2005 Comoros presidential elections. Her contributions to the field of peace and security will be remembered and treasured.



VISIBILITY AND ONLINE PRESENCE

In today's digital age, it is crucial to embrace social media to enhance the visibility of existing initiatives, foster a stronger connection with Member States and enhance collaboration and partnership with other stakeholders and the regional community at large. In this regard, COMESA Governance, Peace, and Security Unit consistently shared updates, milestones, and initiatives on the social media platform X. By prioritising vibrant digital storytelling, GPS saw its Twitter/X audience surge by over 6% in the first quarter of 2025, scaling from 1,223 to over 1,300 engaged followers. This digital momentum reflects the success of targeted advocacy that highlights the governance, peace and security programmes, with followers actively sharing content and participating in policy discussions. The GPS Unit intends to maintain this momentum and continue leveraging on credible and popular social media platforms to direct more awareness towards GPS activities.



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