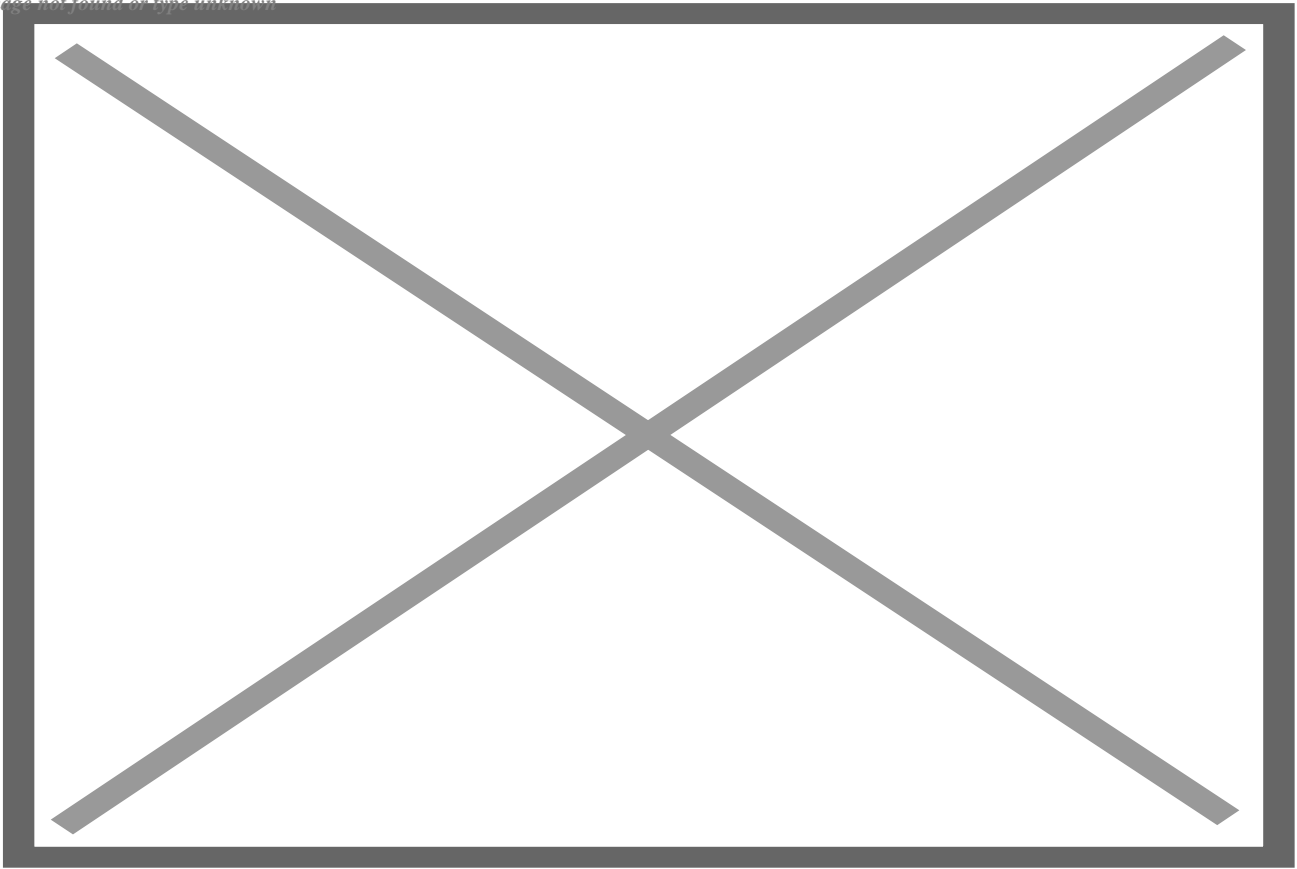


African Union chief says Ukraine's Zelensky not ready for peace plan

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Egypt's Prime Minister Mustafa Madbuly, Senegal's President Macky Sall, President of the Union of Comoros Azali Assoumani, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema talk during their meeting in Kyiv on June 16, 2023. (Ukrainian Presidential Press Office photo via AP)

St. Petersburg, July 27 (RHC)-- President Vladimir Zelensky's demand for preconditions to be met before Kiev engages in peace talks with Moscow is understandable but also "perhaps unreasonable," according to the president of Comoros, Azali Assoumani, who currently chairs the African Union (AU). He added

that Zelensky had acknowledged African leaders' belief that his country's conflict with Russia cannot be resolved through military means, during a meeting last month.

Assoumani was part of a peace mission of senior African leaders and officials, including the presidents of South Africa, Senegal, and Zambia, who visited St. Petersburg and Kiev in mid-June for talks with Russian leader Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Zelensky.

Discussing Zelensky's attitude toward the African peace initiative in an interview with RIA Novosti on Thursday, Assoumani noted the Ukrainian leader's stance "that he demands for preconditions to be met before starting negotiations seems to be already known everywhere." "But we haven't yet received any convincing confirmation of his interest [in engaging in peace talks]," he stressed.

Earlier this month, Zelensky reiterated that talks with Moscow could only begin after Russian forces withdraw from all Ukrainian territory within the country's 1991 borders, including Crimea.

Russia has rejected the demands as unrealistic, arguing that they are a sign of Kiev's unwillingness to settle the conflict through diplomatic means. According to Moscow, this leaves it with no choice other than to continue working toward achieving its goals through military means.

Assoumani said that African leaders had recommended to Zelensky that he "sits down [at the negotiating table] and discusses" a way out of the crisis.

The Ukrainian president's demands for preconditions to be met first is "understandable, but perhaps unreasonable," he added. "We start discussions to find a solution. But if we have decisions already before negotiations, what's the point of any discussions at all?" the AU chief asked.

However, Assoumani pointed out that during their meeting in Kiev, Zelensky "took note very sincerely... that it's impossible to achieve results with the use of weapons."

The African peace initiative consists of ten points, including calls for security guarantees and for the free movement of grain through the Black Sea, as well as the release of prisoners and the swift start of peace negotiations.

Assoumani gave the interview on the sidelines of the two-day Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum, which kicked off in St. Petersburg on Thursday. The high-profile event hosted by Putin is being attended by delegations from 49 African nations, 17 of which are being led by their respective heads of state.

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