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UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

2024 HIGH-LEVEL AFRICAN COUNTER-TERRORISM MEETING
“Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institution Building to Address the Evolving
Threat of Terrorism in Africa”
Abuja, Nigeria, 22-23 April 2024

Concept Note

INTRODUCTION

1. The Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in partnership with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) will organize a High-Level African Counter-Terrorism meeting on “Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institution Building to Address the Evolving Threat of Terrorism in Africa” on 22-23 April 2024 in Abuja, Nigeria. The main concept of the meeting is based on the discussions during the Ministerial meeting of African Member States that was co-organized by the Government of Nigeria and UNOCT on 21 September 2023 on the margins of the high-level week of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly.
2. This two-day meeting will bring together approximately 32 African Member States (at the Ministerial and National Security Adviser-level) successful in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism as well as a diverse range of participants, including heads of African regional organizations, international partners, United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities, and civil society partners, for a robust and practical exchange on addressing the evolving threat of terrorism in Africa.
3. The objective of the meeting is to enhance multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation and reshape the international community’s collective response to terrorism in Africa while emphasizing the importance of African-led and African-owned solutions. The meeting will also review the nature and severity of the threat of terrorism in the continent with a view to agreeing on concrete strategic priorities and measures focused on institutional approaches to address this scourge. It will also foster deeper regional collaboration, enhancing the institutional capacity of African nations, and facilitating the exchange of best practices and knowledge to combat the dynamic and multifaceted threat of terrorism in Africa.
4. By addressing regional security and stability issues in an inclusive manner, the meeting aims to reinvigorate multilateralism, contributing to the Summit of the Future scheduled for September 2024 and the formulation of an action-oriented “Pact for the Future”.

THREAT LANDSCAPE

5. The spread of terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism is a growing threat to peace, security, and stability in Africa, derailing the progress towards the realization of the aspirations of the UN Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union

Agenda 2063. Da'esh, Al-Qaida, and their affiliates have exploited instability and conflict to increase their activities and intensify attacks across Africa. In the first three quarters of 2023, the continent recorded 2,122 terrorist attacks resulting in over 12,000 (mainly civilian) fatalities.¹ These attacks are predominantly carried out by local terrorist groups with affiliation to Al-Qaida and/or Da'esh that have adeptly capitalized on local grievances, forging extensive operational networks and disseminating their radical ideologies across the continent. Prominent among these groups are the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), operating in the Sahel; the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), primarily active in the Lake Chad Basin while Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) has gradually extended its reach towards the Gulf of Guinea. Some of these groups are gaining global reach, posing a grave threat to regional stability. In parallel, the presence and expansion of Da'esh affiliates into Central and Southern Africa is very concerning. The proliferation of weapons, transfer of funds, sharing of knowledge, and movement of fighters across the continent illustrate the transregional nature of the threat.

6. Meanwhile terrorist groups have demonstrated increasing capacity to use improvised explosive devices, unmanned aerial systems, and other technologies. Concurrently, Al Shabab, entrenched in Somalia, has demonstrated the capacity to raise funds and collect revenues from a range of illicit activities including kidnapping for ransom and ostensibly legitimate businesses, thus demonstrating resilience and adaptability. These evolving dynamics underscore the critical necessity for comprehensive regional cooperation and the fortification of institutional frameworks to effectively confront and mitigate these threats.

7. Violent extremism and terrorism do not constitute a new phenomenon and, for decades, national and international actors have promoted various interventions, with various degrees of success. Challenges are exacerbated by the lack of universally agreed definitions by Member States and the absence of system-wide guidance for UN support. Addressing these threats requires taking stock of lessons learned from past and ongoing approaches. Given the multidimensional nature of these threats, there is no one-size-fits-all approach and interventions must be tailored according to conflict dynamics, national capacities and security challenges. Achieving effective results requires promoting comprehensive, complementary and coherent approaches at the local, national and regional levels. Most importantly, it requires promoting national ownership and respecting the sovereignty of Member States, which have the prerogative in devising the legal, institutional and policy framework for those efforts.

INITIATIVES BY AFRICAN MEMBER STATES AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

8. Promoting peace and stability in Africa has been a long-term investment for the African Union in countering terrorism. The African Union (AU) Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, (1999); the Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa, (2002) and the Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (2004), serve as foundational documents in addressing terrorism on the continent. The AU established the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT/CAERT) and the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) to support and promote operational cooperation among Member States. In addition, the 2022 AU Malabo Declaration on terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government in Africa adopted by the Heads of State and Government, reaffirms the commitment of African Member States to combat terrorism

¹ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, *Quarterly Africa Terrorism Bulletin*, Editions 004-006.

collectively. It further underscored financial support for counter-terrorism efforts, called for the establishment of an African Ministerial Committee, and prioritized initiatives to combat transnational crime, strengthen cybersecurity, and empower communities affected by terrorism, emphasizing collaboration and international partnerships.

9. African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) have made significant efforts and progress in countering terrorism. For instance, during the 64th Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja on 15 December 2023, leaders highlighted the need to urgently resume efforts to activate a regional counterterrorism force and to mobilize mandatory financial, human and material contributions for said structure. In Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat launched a Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre in Tanzania in February 2022, which aims to build financial and technical capacity regarding the movement of foreign terrorist fighters, and financing of terrorist activities. They also established the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) to support the government of Mozambique to combat terrorism in Cabo Delgado and restore law and order. In East Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) established in 2018 in Djibouti a Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE) to promote the sharing of good practices and development of trainings on civil society and community outreach as well as strategic communications.

10. Across the continent, ad hoc sub-regional initiatives such as the Accra Initiative, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin that is supported by Nigeria, the Eastern Africa Fusion and Liaison Unit (EAFLU) have demonstrated the commitment of affected nations to combat terrorism on a regional basis. Similarly, expressing grave concern about the growing threat and scope of terrorism in the Great Lakes region, five member-countries of the Coordination and Contact Group (CCG) – DRC, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania – in line with the Peace Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) adopted under the auspices of the AU, International Conference of the Great Lakes region (ICGLR), SADC, and the UN, reiterated the need for close cooperation, including through the development of an anti-terrorism strategy focusing on non-military measures, such as efforts to address radicalization. Meanwhile, at the national level, African Member States have developed a range of strategies and tools to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism. As such, this includes, amongst others, the establishment of the Nigerian National Counter Terrorism Centre, which leads national efforts at combatting terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism by developing coordinated strategies and integrating all CT actions across the government.

ORGANIZING PARTNERS

11. The Federal Government of Nigeria's fight against terrorism dates back to 2009. In response to the challenges of terrorism, the Terrorism Prevention Act 2011 as amended in 2013 was signed into law. The act designated the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) as the Coordinating Office for Nigeria's Counter Terrorism efforts. Consequently, the Counter Terrorism Centre (CTC) was established in 2012, but operated as a directorate, in the ONSA. Following the development of the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) 2016, Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism 2017, and the National Security Strategy 2019 in the country, the role of the Centre became more robust and enlarged as a value-adding entity to other strategic agencies and partners in the National CT efforts.

In realization that the military approach alone cannot adequately counter ideology based terrorism, the Federal Government of Nigeria adopted a soft approach to counter terrorism efforts known as the “Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) Programme. Nigeria reviewed its countering violent extremism process which informed the need for a complementary “Whole of Society and Whole of Government approach” in dealing with violent extremism. These led to the development and launch of Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism as well as the DDDR National Action Plan which is currently undergoing review.

12. This growing profile has meant increased interest in the activities of the centre, both home and abroad. To meet the increasing need for effective coordination, the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) was subsequently formally established following the enactment of the Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act of 2022, and designated as the coordinating body for counter-terrorism and terrorism financing in Nigeria. The Centre is charged with the coordination of counter terrorism policies, strategies, plans and support in furtherance of Nigeria’s Counter Terrorism objectives. The NCTC has pioneered key initiatives since 2012, including providing leadership, coordination and strategic guidance to Armed Forces, security, law enforcement and intelligence agencies on Counter Terrorism matters in line with the mandate of the National Security Adviser.

13. The United Nations remains a key partner in efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism in Africa. In this respect, while recognizing that African Member States have primary responsibility to counter and prevent terrorism in the continent, the United Nations also continues to take measures to promote international cooperation on the subject, in line with its Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/77/298). For instance, in February 2023, the General Assembly adopted a resolution expressing grave concern about the growing threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism, as and when conducive to terrorism, to the peace, security and social and economic development of Africa, and called upon the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), within its existing mandates, to intensify cooperation, assistance and capacity-building for the African Member States, the African Union and African subregional organizations (A/RES/77/271).

14. The Security Council in its resolution 2719 (2023) of 21 December recognized the changing nature of conflicts in Africa and the need to be able to draw on a range of international responses and their complementarity to fit the specific complex operating environments and evolving threats, including in some environments the increasing use of asymmetric tactics by non-state armed groups, terrorists and violent extremists, as well as the sophistication of violent extremism conducive to terrorism. This landmark resolution put forward by the “Africa-3” members of the Security Council provide African-led peace operations a framework for access to United Nations assessed contributions – a request supported by United Nations Secretary-General in his report Our Common Agenda and his policy brief A New Agenda for Peace. This comes after the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on 7 December 2023, encouraging the United Nations, in particular the UNOCT and its Global CT Compact Entities as well as regional and subregional organizations to continue their endeavors to provide, within their respective mandates, technical assistance and capacity-building to Member States, upon their request to support them in preventing and countering terrorism (S/PRST/2023/6).

15. UNOCT was established on 15 June 2017 by the General Assembly to strengthen the capability of the United Nations to assist Member States in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. UNOCT leads the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact comprising 46 compact entities, including 5 non-UN entities (IOM, IPU, INTERPOL, IMF, FATF), 14 regional organizations and focal points of 137 Member States nominated to enhance coordination and coherence across the United Nations system. It delivers specialized technical assistance through global and regional capacity-building programmes, including through its Programme Offices in Nairobi and Rabat and cooperation with United Nations Country Teams and field missions. UNOCT has developed solid partnerships with the African Union and regional organizations (e.g. EAC, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC) and coordinates closely with international partners and multilateral mechanisms (e.g. Global Counter-Terrorism Forum's East and West Africa Working Groups, Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS Africa Focus Group). Since 2023, UNOCT has placed a strategic emphasis on its initiatives in the African continent. It remains committed to bolstering the United Nations' counter-terrorism engagement and presence, actively supporting African Member States and regional/subregional organizations in their endeavors to combat terrorism and prevent violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

16. To ensure result-oriented and focused discussions during the Summit, the following questions are suggested for consideration:

- a. What are the political and operational challenges to a more coordinated, complementary and effective response by African Member States and institutions to the terrorist threat on the continent?
- b. In what ways can current African initiatives to combat terrorism be reinvigorated to meet current and emerging threats?
- c. What tangible additional support can the international community provide to African-led efforts to counter terrorism on the continent, including financial resources and expertise?
- d. What experiences and practices, at the United Nations and regional level can be promoted and institutionalized towards combating terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism, under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter?
- e. In case of military action against terrorist groups, how can African-led and Africa-owned operations benefit from international support, and can be fully human-rights compliant?
- f. How can international cooperation and coordination help prevent /counter the expansion of terrorism in Africa, and how can current initiatives be further strengthened?
- g. Which type of threats and capacity gaps require priority response in terms of regional coordination and capacity-building, including through the programmatic support of UNOCT and other UN Global Counter-Terrorism Compact entities?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

17. The High-Level meeting is expected to yield a range of critical outcomes, including:

- a. **Enhanced Regional Collaboration:** The Summit will promote deeper collaboration among African Member States, including with other partners, fostering joint initiatives to counter terrorism effectively, including establishing a network of African Counter-Terrorism Coordinators with UN support.

- b. Strengthened Institutional Capabilities: Through knowledge exchange and technical assistance, African nations will be better equipped to address terrorism, including improving border security, preventing and countering radicalization, and enhancing law enforcement and judicial responses.
- c. Improved Information Sharing: The summit will establish channels for enhanced information sharing among African states, international partners, and organizations, facilitating a more coordinated response to emerging threats.
- d. Enhanced Multilateral Cooperation: Renewed commitment from the international community for collaboration with Africa-led counter-terrorism initiatives.
- e. Enhanced Resource Mobilization: Enhanced and joint resource mobilization for priority African counter-terrorism capacity-building programmes, as well as promotion of the package of the joint UN flagship programmes in Africa launched by the UN Joint Appeal for Counter-Terrorism in Africa in June 2023.

FORMAT AND LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

18. The meeting will encompass a carefully designed format, consistent with the UN diplomatic protocol, including a high-level opening session; a plenary of Ministers and National Security Advisers; four thematic sessions featuring high-level discussions on key themes. **Detailed logistical information, including the agenda and participant guidelines, will be communicated to registered attendees closer to the event.**