

Peacebuilding Commission Informal Meeting on the Situation in the Sahel

6 March 2017

Chairperson's Summary of the Discussion

Background

On 6 March 2017, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an informal meeting to address the situation in the Sahel, in response to the Security Council Presidential Statement of 20 January 2017 (S/PRST/2017/2). The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Cho Tae-yul, Chair of the PBC.

1. The Chair opened the meeting recalling that the Security Council Presidential Statement of 20 January 2017 (S/PRST/2017/2) emphasized the convening role of the PBC in mobilizing international support, in collaboration with the United Nations Office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), for implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). He noted that, despite positive political developments in West Africa, the situation in the Sahel remained precarious due to security, development and humanitarian challenges. He recalled that while several national, regional, and international efforts had been underway to address those challenges, there was also the need to further enhance coordination and collaboration among all relevant actors.
2. In this context, the Chair welcomed the opportunity for the PBC to convene a variety of stakeholders in the region, including countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), African Union (AU), G5 Sahel, European Union (EU) and United Nations actors at both headquarters and in the field.
3. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, noted that despite the increased violence, the Sahel showed a positive trend that had to be supported. He noted that security remained a key challenge which was leading to a high allocation of financial resources toward the defense sector in countries of the region. He underscored that this situation required a global response and more emphasis on prevention. There was a high level of international support to the region, manifested in the high number of envoys and strategies for the Sahel. With regard to UNISS, he said that the United Nations would continue to support regional initiatives, including national efforts, and activities of the G5 Sahel and the work of the AU in the region. He concluded by reiterating the progress made by countries in the region in fighting organized crime and terrorism, as well as in improving cross-border collaboration.
4. The AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, H.E. Mr. Pierre Buyoya, stressed that the security situation in the Sahel was deteriorating and insecurity was extending beyond the region. However, he welcomed the determination of countries in the Sahel to respond to this

challenge in a coordinated manner. He pointed out that the Nouakchott Process to promote regional cooperation and the recent decision of the G5 Sahel countries to establish joint forces to fight terrorism were important steps in this regard. He noted that the AU would provide political support for the region through the establishment of the joint forces and the Ministerial coordination platform for the Sahel.

5. The Permanent Secretary of the G5 Sahel, Mr. Najim Elhadj Mohamed, pointed to the high number of existing strategies for the Sahel which required some level of coordination. He noted that the strategy of the G5 Sahel was focused on supporting countries facing security challenges and strengthening development efforts, including infrastructure in the region. On the security side, he referred to the ongoing collaboration with the EU focused on military training, cross border cooperation and early warning mechanisms. He underscored that more funding was required to tackle security and development challenges in the region and called for a “Marshall Plan” for the Sahel, which should support efforts aimed at fighting, inter alia, illicit trafficking and youth radicalization.
6. The EU Special Representative for the Sahel, Mr. Angel Losada, noted that the international community had several instruments available for the Sahel and stressed the need for coordination among all partners involved. He recalled that the European Union strategy for the Sahel was built upon the core idea that security and development could not be separated in the Sahel and was structured around four main pillars: development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; political and diplomatic action; security and the rule of law; and countering violent extremism and radicalization. Building on this strategy, the EU was currently focusing on four priorities: prevention and countering radicalization; support for youth; migration; and illicit trafficking and organised crime.
7. The Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa of UNDP, Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, noted that the Sahel represented an important case for sustaining peace. He recognized that the challenges in the region led to an oversupply of studies and mechanisms, which now require more work on coordination. He underscored that more funding was required to tackle challenges related to security, illicit trafficking and migration. He noted that the PBC was a unique platform to sustain attention to the Sahel and to address cross-border challenges.
8. The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, shared that the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) had provided Peacebuilding Fund(PBF) support of \$26 million in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, with a focus on the governance and security pillars of UNISS as well as cross-border and transnational peacebuilding challenges. In northern Mali, the PBF supported the implementation of the peace agreement, focusing on providing the population with early peace dividends in areas marginalized and mistrustful of authorities (US\$14.5 million). In Niger, support was provided to community-based political dialogue with a focus on youth and women, as well as capacity building for conflict resolution related to the management of natural resources (US\$ 9million). In Burkina Faso, support was provided to peacebuilding priorities in the areas of human rights, justice and the rule of law, national reconciliation and security sector reform

(US\$ 3 million). In Chad, the fund will support projects to prevent recruitment, support social cohesion, strengthen community based conflict management and to improve relations between communities and security forces. He agreed that there was a need to foster a coherent and multi-dimensional approach going beyond the military and security responses. He underscored that the PBC was well positioned to carry forward this approach and support UNOWAS.

9. The Permanent Representative of Mali, H.E. Mr. Issa Konfourou, speaking in the capacity as chair of the G5 Sahel and on behalf of its members, thanked the Commission for convening this meeting and inviting the countries of the G5 Sahel. He underscored that the PBC must be considered a strategic partner for the region. He informed that the G5 Sahel was created to respond in a coherent manner to the transnational nature of the challenges facing the Sahel countries. The decision on the establishment in February 2017 of the Joint Force, motivated by the interdependence between peace, security and development, testifies to the efficiency brought by enhanced regional cooperation. He concluded by advocating for stronger synergies between UNOWAS, UN Peacebuilding Architecture, and the G5 Sahel in the implementation of the strategy for the Sahel.
10. Member States welcomed the decision of the PBC Chair to respond to the request of the Security Council in a timely manner. Representatives of the PBC spoke and highlighted:
 - Challenges in the Sahel, which are complex and multifaceted, going beyond the security dimension to include development and humanitarian dimensions, require a coherent response from all relevant stakeholders.
 - The Council should recall that the Security Council had tasked the PBC to bring together all relevant partners to support UNOWAS in the implementation of UNISS. PBC was invited to focus on five elements identified in S/PRST/2017/2 and support UNOWAS in its report back to the Council in July 2017.
 - The PBC should become a forum for Member States and the UN system to discuss concrete actions for positive impact on the ground. The high number of strategies for the Sahel could adversely reduce the efficiency and coherence of the support of the international community. There was a clear need for stronger coordination in the region.
 - The Commission should engage international financial institutions and the private sector and advocate for greater attention to the region, with a focus on strengthening capacities and infrastructure in the Sahel.
 - The recent visit of the Security Council to the Lake Chad region was timely and relevant. The PBC should extend an invitation to the President or a member of the Security Council to brief the Commission on the main findings of the visit.
11. The Chair closed the meeting reiterating that, in order for the PBC to live up to the rising expectations of Member States, the Commission should be more proactive and further improve the quality of its policy advice, particularly in connection with requests of the Security Council on the situations in the Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and the Sahel. With regard to the Sahel, the Chair announced that he intended to work closely

with UNOWAS and Member States to further support UNOWAS in the implementation of UNISS. He will also convene further meetings to mobilize the support of other relevant stakeholders in advancing the implementation of UNISS.
