

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

30 June 2021

1. On 30 June, H.E. Mohamed Edrees, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting focused on efforts to address Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. In his opening remarks, the Chair reminded that the meeting can pave the way for further support from the international community, including the Peacebuilding Commission, for related efforts of national and regional stakeholders, including for the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct concerning the repression of Piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime crime activities in West and Central Africa. He added, in his national capacity, that Egypt will continue to provide technical assistance, training courses and capacity building programs on combatting piracy in addition to strengthening military and intelligence cooperation with countries of the region.

2. Mr. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) stated that, in recent years, the Gulf of Guinea has become the epicenter of worldwide criminality at sea. He warned that maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea increases the risk of collaboration between Al-Qaeda and Islamic State-affiliated groups in the Sahel on the one hand, and networks involved in transnational maritime crime on the other. He also alerted about the often-neglected human cost of maritime organized crime, as illustrated by the growing number of incidents of migration at sea, including human trafficking, which disproportionately affects women and children. He expressed concern about the impact of climate change and the associated degradation of the maritime environment seen across the Gulf of Guinea, which negatively affects the livelihoods of coastal communities and lowers the hurdle for engaging in illicit activities. He informed about continuous UNOCA and UNOWAS coordinated activities with ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GCC) in support of the Inter-Regional Co-ordination Centre (ICC) efforts to tackle maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

3. Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), stated that the Gulf of Guinea remains a persistently challenging area to police and secure. Last year saw 84 attacks at sea; 130 people were kidnapped in these attacks, and the violence has not stopped in 2021. She explained that, while there are prosecutions underway, not a single suspect has ever been convicted of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea thus far. She presented the preliminary findings of a UNODC study on pirate activity in the Gulf of Guinea, which indicate that there are not more than six pirate groups with the capability of operating in deep waters in the Gulf of Guinea at present; and that each of these groups has approximately 30 to 50 members. Most of their attacks target international vessels to kidnap crew members for ransom. The overall combined income resulting from these attacks is approximately 4 million dollars per year, but the economic impact is estimated to be in the range of 800 million. She confirmed that UNODC supports the review of legislation in coastal countries in West and Central Africa, trains judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers, and supports regional cooperation initiatives. She announced plans to partner with Norway and the NGO Stable Sea to produce an analysis of the cost of piracy by the end of this year, and she called for swift and coordinated action to redress this situation, even as the threat itself evolves and grows.

4. Ms. Giovanie Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, delivered remarks on behalf of Mr. Annadif Khatir Mahamat Saleh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). She expressed concern about the deteriorating situation in the Gulf of Guinea, which has serious implications for local communities as it is increasing the risk of environmental pollution from oil pillaging, reducing local revenues and disproportionately affecting women who constitute the majority of the labor force for fish processing in the Gulf of Guinea, while at the same time further enabling illegal migration and human trafficking. Echoing SRSF Fall's remarks, she warned that the sophisticated means used by pirates in the Gulf of Guinea point to the proliferation of equally sophisticated arms in the Sahel. She confirmed the close collaboration with UNOCA, including through joint missions and advocacy, in support of efforts of ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC to assist the functioning and operationalization of regional coordination mechanisms for maritime security; facilitate active engagement of Heads of Institutions of the ICC; and help address the challenges to peace and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

5. Général Francis Béhanzin, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs and Peacekeeping, explained that ECOWAS works in close collaboration with its technical and financial partners, particularly with the European Union and Denmark, and especially within the framework of the EU-UNODC 2019-2023 project for Strengthening Criminal Justice Systems in West and Central Africa (SWAIMS), and the FAO-EU 2018-2021 project for "Improved regional governance of marine resources in the area of the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic -CECAF " (CECAF-PESCAO). He informed that the next meeting of senior officials of the Interregional Coordination Center (ICC) is scheduled to take place in Abuja on 27-30 July 2021 and emphasized the importance of stronger support for the full functioning of the ICC.

6. H.E. Florentina Adenike Ukonga, Executive Secretary, Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) stressed that criminality in the Gulf of Guinea region continues to pose a serious threat to peace and security, threatening lives and affecting maritime transportation of people as well as goods and services, investments, and livelihoods. The effectiveness of the ICC has been negatively affected by lack of needed funds, personnel and equipment. Cognizant of these challenges, the GGC, as parent Organization of the ICC, organizes relevant seminars with experts from the international community, mobilizes support, and undertakes advocacy in support of the full operationalization of the ICC. This includes advocacy for cutting down illegal fishing activities, which negatively affects sustainable livelihoods and renders coastal communities, particularly the youth, vulnerable when pirates and criminals seek recruitment. She presented the exemplary action taken by Ghana to combat illegal fishing activities and Nigeria's efforts to convict pirates, which are worth emulating in other countries.

7. Speaking on behalf of H.E. Gilberto Da Piedade Verissimo, President, The Commission of Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Mr. Daniel Pascal Elono expressed great concern about the deteriorating situation in the Gulf of Guinea and its serious implications for local communities. He called for the full operationalization of the Zone A (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola) and called for stronger support for the Regional Center for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC), which is located in Point Noir, Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite difficulties, Zone D has seen some progress. ECCAS is encouraged by the renewed commitment at the highest level by the Central African sub-region to curbing maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. On 4 May, ECCAS Ministers of defense reaffirmed

their resolve to take appropriate measures both at a national and regional level to address maritime security. At the 51st ministerial session of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (UNSAC) hosted by the Republic of Burundi on 28 May, Central African states reiterated their call that maritime security should remain high on the agenda of the region.

8. Building on [materials](#) shared prior to the meeting, including Mr. Michael Howlett, Director, International Maritime Bureau, explained that the IMB is the anti-crime unit of the International Chamber of Commerce, the only business organization mandated to fight against all types of maritime crime and malpractice. He added that trade is the single greatest enabler for peace and security, for economic growth, job creation, and opportunity. He recognized the steps taken by the UN along with the Heads of State and Governments of ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC to address this crime in the waters of the Gulf of Guinea, and called for greater transparency, information exchange, and operational interoperability, not only within littoral States, but also with independent bodies, such as the IMB piracy reporting center. He argued that this would enable a greater awareness of the problem, and a more effective and robust response under law. He emphasized that the Yaoundé Code of Conduct provides the architecture for this, and he noted that Nigeria's deep blue project and the Gulf of Guinea maritime collaboration forum are both complementary initiatives to be supported, commended and sustained.

9. Mr. Junior Narciso Faztudo, Deputy Executive Director, Interregional Coordination Center, provided a historic overview of the establishment of the architecture for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, with the ICC at its center. He stressed that blue economy, in other words the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems, is essential for social development in the Gulf of Guinea. He explained that the ICC is young institution which unfortunately is understaffed and faces severe budget limitations. He urged for stronger support from all partners of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct for the Center's full operationalization. Despite its challenges, the ICC is actively undertaking mandated activities, including through the establishment of contact points in the region. These will be announced during the forum of maritime collaboration, which will hold its first plenary session on 14 July.

The Commission welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- Acknowledged that West and Central Africa have championed several cross-regional initiatives to curb piracy in their respective maritime domains. Among them is the establishment by ECOWAS, ECCAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GCC) of the 'Yaounde architecture', which remains to date the most promising regional coordination mechanism for West and Central Africa on maritime security.
- Stressed that Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea inflicts heavy costs, both human and economic, in the region and beyond, and emphasized that sustainable crime prevention in the Gulf of Guinea requires a holistic, development-centered approach that addresses the plight of communities and aims to provide them with decent livelihoods. In this respect, recognized the importance of sustainable fisheries and oceans, in line with the High-level Panel report on sustainable ocean economies, and encouraged more robust action to fight Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing to avoid depleted fish stocks and protect local level community fishing. Also agreed that efforts at sea should be complemented by commensurate initiatives on land, including by working

toward stability of the West and Central and the Sahel regions, and tackling the root causes of terrorism.

- Recognized that a sustainable response to maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea requires the international community and partners' continued, coordinated political and financial support to the ICC to strengthen the existing regional coordination mechanisms for maritime security, including the integration of efforts between West and Central Africa; cooperation with international and European partners; the harmonization of legal frameworks to better address piracy at sea; and the ratification of relevant maritime security related treaties and protocols by the states in the two regions.
- Recognized that Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is growing in scope and sophistication and underscored the need to consolidate the frameworks and capacities to enforce the law in the region's waters before the threat escalates further. The Commission recognized that capacity-building efforts must be owned by coastal countries and regional organizations and acknowledged that national authorities should be assisted in providing standardized and sustainable anti-piracy training to their own officials, and when possible, to those of neighboring countries.
- Highlighted the importance of ensuring criminal convictions and encouraged countries in the region who have yet to introduce piracy as a self-standing offence under their criminal law, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to do so.
- Recognized that the private sector can be a valuable partner in the fight against piracy and encouraged the UN to continue working in cooperation with international partners, the private sector, coastal communities, and all stakeholders, to combat piracy and maritime crime for a safe and prosperous Gulf of Guinea.
- Noted the recent meeting of the G7++ friends of Gulf of Guinea, co-chaired by the United Kingdom and Senegal in London, which highlighted the importance of broadening regional engagement and capability and underscored the need to ensure effective implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. The G7++ meeting also stressed the need to continue to bring industry, civil society and other relevant stakeholders into efforts that aim to address piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, including through the provision of regional solutions as well as the involvement of civil society, the private sector and the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum.
- Took note of the preliminary findings of a UNODC study on pirate activity in the Gulf of Guinea and looked forward to the final report and recommendations. The Commission asked for timely updates on efforts to strengthen the maritime architecture in the Gulf of Guinea, including the outcome of future visits by the two SRSGs and preparations for a donors' conference for maritime operationalization, called for by the briefers and some Member States. Noted that good practices and lessons learnt from other regions which had experienced piracy, such as off the Somalia coast, could help inform the efforts in the Gulf of Guinea.