

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the Sahel region and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel

28 April 2021
Chair's Summary

1. On 28 April, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held a virtual Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Sahel region and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). H.E. Mohamed Edrees, Chair of the PBC, convened the meeting to reflect on developments in the region since the last PBC meeting on the Sahel in October 2020 and to consider areas in need of support, including for the effective implementation of the UNISS. In his opening remarks, the Chair expressed his condolences for the demise of President Idriss Déby Itno of Chad. He underlined the broad awareness of the complex nature of threats and challenges facing the Sahel region, and stressed the need for more robust and coordinated action and stronger partnerships to help address these multidimensional challenges in the region. He recalled the discussions during the “Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development” in March 2021, and underscored that it is becoming increasingly apparent that the Sahel region is in dire need of a new modus operandi. To date, the plethora of strategies launched by the various actors at the different levels have been insufficient in capturing and addressing the complex realities on the ground in an integrated and coherent manner.
2. The United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, explained that the precarious security situation in the region forces affected governments to dedicate large portions of their national budgets to military spending, which strains resources for much needed development and peacebuilding investments and calls for stronger support from the international community and enhanced partnerships. In that regard, he stated that UNISS remains the most complete roadmap in the arsenal of UN responses and informed of ongoing efforts to enhance the proactiveness and effectiveness of UN actions, particularly through increased cross-border investments and greater support for women and youth, building on project results on the ground supported by the Peacebuilding Fund.
3. The Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovanie Biha, stated that preserving the fragile democratic space in the Sahel region requires additional support for initiatives that aim to promote inclusive governance and empower women and youth. She noted the growing commitment by States in the region to actively engage women in their strategies to counter terrorism, maintain peace and promote sustainable development. She informed of efforts to scale up UN action under UNISS and partnerships with IFIs and other stakeholders, which is particularly needed at a time when the security landscape is increasingly volatile and resources for social services are overstretched as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. The African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, noted ongoing security efforts of the countries in region, notably through the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. He informed that the African Union, after authorizing these forces, continues to advocate for the G5 Sahel Joint Force to operate under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. He also updated on African Union efforts to promote regional security within the framework of the Nouakchott Process. He deplored the relatively limited financial resources for peacebuilding in the Sahel, despite efforts by the African Union and the United Nations to address this gap and called for the mobilization of additional resources to support the priorities set out by the countries concerned.
5. Ms. Fatchima Nayaya from the NGO WARAKA based in Niger presented examples of positive change in Niger brought about by empowering women and youth, including through initiatives that aim to build economic resilience through community training, promote peaceful coexistence and tolerance, and enhance sustainable livelihoods. She explained that WARAKA enhances social cohesion by investing in community interventions that are tailored to meet local community needs and respect the natural environment. Such interventions include the promotion of sustainable farming and animal breeding practices and trainings for climate change adaptation. She stated that funding women and youth initiatives is critical for sustainable development and peacebuilding in the Sahel.
6. The European Union Special Representative for the Sahel, H.E. Mr. Ángel Losada Fernandez, informed that during the period of the previous EU Sahel strategy (2011-2020), the EU mobilized all instruments at its disposal, from humanitarian aid to security forces to local-level development support, and now intends to intensify its political efforts through a new, ambitious, inclusive and flexible strategy based on the principle of mutual accountability with Sahel partner authorities. He added that on 19 April the Council of the EU approved conclusions reaffirming the importance of long-term partnership between the EU and the Sahel, and emphasized the importance of addressing root-causes of conflict and strengthening capabilities of governmental and non-governmental actors to build community resilience.
7. The Permanent Representative of Chad to the United Nations, H.E. Ms. Ammo Aziza Baroud, on behalf of the G5 Sahel, deplored the deteriorating security situation despite the efforts of the G5 Sahel and partners. She called for stronger and better coordinated international action in support of the well identified priorities articulated in the various strategies for development and security in the region, including stronger support for the Priority Investment Program of the G5 Sahel. She referred to the 7th Ordinary Session of the Authority of the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel, held in N'Djamena on 16 February, which called for action beyond the military effort, and for a collective effort to increase support for humanitarian and good governance initiatives. She also called for continuous support to the G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat, based in Nouakchott, to undertake peacebuilding activities. The ECOWAS Permanent Observer in

NY, H.E. Mr. Mahama Kappiah, noted with concern the increase in terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism and stressed the importance of regional collaboration for addressing the spillover from frontline states to coastal areas.

8. Mr. Pierre Bonneau, Country Management Unit, World Bank Group, informed that 1.4 million people in the Sahel had fallen into extreme poverty and expressed concern about the limited prospects for economic improvements before 2022. He explained that the World Bank had stepped up its engagement with US\$8.5 billion (US\$2.3 billion in new instruments on prevention and resilience) and mentioned plans to attract an additional US\$2.2 billion through private sector investments in water management, agriculture, human development, infrastructure and connectivity transformation. Ms. Marie-Laure Akinolugbade, Director General for West Africa, African Development Bank, mentioned that its current portfolio US\$3 billion in the Sahel, which includes support for programs contained in the Sahel Alliance portfolio, encompasses initiatives in the areas of agriculture, climate change, human development, infrastructure, and supporting for an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and private sector investments. She noted that, in the 10 countries that are included in UNISS, the AfDB has helped during the last decade over 2.1 million people benefit from new electricity connections; over 7 million people benefit from improvements in agriculture; over 9 million people benefit from improved access to transport; and over 14 million people benefit from improved access to water and sanitation, with approximately half of beneficiaries being women.
9. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
 - They conveyed condolences for the death of President Déby and stressed the importance of restoring stability and constitutional order in Chad through free and fair elections at the end of the transition, which is vital for the wider Sahel region.
 - They expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the precarious security situation across much of the region and recognized the budgetary burden caused by increased security expenditures and reduced revenue collection in several countries in the Sahel, at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is also constraining resources. They called for stronger links between the UN development system and the UN humanitarian entities in the Sahel and encouraged the development and use of a shared information management system that can help ensure that the development and humanitarian systems and actors are coordinating efforts, including for programming and resource mobilization needs.
 - They recognized that UNISS remains a useful tool for ensuring proactive and effective UN activities in the Sahel to help tackle the root causes and drivers of instability in the region and welcomed the continuing support from the Secretary-General's peacebuilding fund for cross-border investments and for empowering women and youth. They encouraged the continuation of efforts for the effective implementation of the UNISS through the UN country teams in the region and welcomed the appointment of Mr. Dieye in his new role as Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.

- They emphasized that any successful approach to stabilisation in the Sahel needs a sufficient focus on civilian and political dimensions, . In that regard, they stressed the need for the MINUSMA components in Mali to work closely in an integrated manner as well as in coordination with relevant actors in the field. They further highlighted the importance of enhancing the contribution of MINUSMA to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.
- They supported the call made during the N’Djamena Summit of 16 February of the G5 Sahel for a “civilian surge”, to complement military efforts, and to increase coherent development, humanitarian and good governance initiatives enhancing the economic autonomy of the population. They also reiterated the call made by the UN Special Coordinator pertaining to the relevance of such approach including through strengthening investments in the periphery regions
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- They welcomed the recent progress on joined-up approaches to conflict prevention, particularly in Burkina Faso, where bilateral donors, the Peacebuilding Fund and the World Bank's Prevention and Resilience Allocation are supporting priority actions under the Government of Burkina Faso’s peacebuilding plan. In that regard, they encouraged the UN and the World Bank to build this approach with other G5 Sahel states, with a focus on joint analysis of conflict and response.
- They highlighted that solutions to the complex challenges in the Sahel need to be grounded in a compressive and multidimensional approach that addresses root causes of conflict in line with the national peacebuilding priorities including through building national institutions and capacities, supporting inclusive development and protection of human rights. They encouraged continuous efforts in support of women's full, equal and meaningful participation in political processes and peacebuilding initiatives, which is a prerequisite for successful peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts. They called for additional measures to empower women and youth to undertake leadership roles in peacebuilding initiatives.
- Recognizing the limited reach of the State and governance related challenges in several Sahel countries, they also underscored the need to ensure support to efforts at the community level, particularly to women- and youth-led organizations. They stressed the importance of building resilient and inclusive communities reinforced by effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions
- They welcomed contributions to the Liptako Gourma mechanism as well as the World Bank ‘Green Wall’ and AfDB ‘Desert to Power’ initiatives, calling for more structural investments, including in response to climate change.
- They noted that the PBC has an important role to play in complementing the focus of the Security Council on peace and security by strengthening engagement with ECOSOC and the development system and supporting strengthened UN partnership with international financial institutions. They committed to continue encouraging greater

system-wide coherence to tackle the root causes of violence and build much needed stability in the region.