

DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

Ending Vicious Cycle of Sahel Terrorism, Crisis Hinges on Mobilizing Joint Action, Resources, Deputy Secretary-General Tells Peacebuilding Commission

Following are UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed's remarks to the Peacebuilding Commission meeting on the Sahel, in New York today:

The Sahel region continues to face increasing challenges. Violent terrorism, armed conflict, extreme poverty and underdevelopment, climate change, displacement and the smuggling of people, drugs and arms are behind staggering levels of vulnerability. Peace, security, development and human rights are intertwined and mutually reinforcing in the Sahel, as everywhere. Unless we address the root causes of these interconnected challenges, their impact will continue to increase and the repercussions will spread.

Our response must be regional, inclusive and led by national Governments. We must ensure that the people of the Sahel can escape this vicious cycle of conflict, terrorism, humanitarian crisis and underdevelopment to forge a new path of peace and sustainable development. Only through an integrated, comprehensive and coherent approach can we address the humanitarian-development nexus and its link to peace.

The Secretary-General has made the Sahel one of his top priorities. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, conceived in 2013, continues to set our course as we support the Governments of the Sahel to address root causes and offer hope of a more stable and prosperous future. The importance of the integrated strategy was reaffirmed by last week's Security Council resolution on support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The Secretary-General has also strengthened efforts towards implementation by establishing the Executive Committee Working Group on the Sahel.

The strategy has now been recalibrated, centred around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustaining Peace Agenda, with a view to achieving concrete results and progress in the near future. There is a greater focus on empowering women and girls, on creating job opportunities for youth and including them in political and peace processes. To support implementation of the strategy, the United Nations system is expanding and strengthening its work, while ensuring that our humanitarian, development and peace and security efforts are complementary and reinforce each other.

The United Nations development system has taken forward measures to improve coordination and coherence by mapping the 17 strategies that are currently being implemented by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. This has enabled us to identify both gaps and opportunities in the short- and long-term. We are now developing an investment plan that will respond to the needs of the revamped integrated strategy for the Sahel. This plan will be closely aligned with the needs and priorities identified by the countries of the Sahel, including the G5 Sahel priority investment plan.

We are working closely with the World Bank, the African Union, the European Union, the Alliance for the Sahel, United Nations Member States and the Governments of the Sahel countries to ensure that our joint response to the crisis is coordinated, coherent, integrated and delivers results. Yesterday, at the One Planet Summit in Paris, we presented a climate-smart agriculture programme that will enhance the resilience of women and young people engaged in small-holder farming. We also expressed our support for the West African coastal erosion initiative, a major investment that will secure livelihoods in the face of rising sea levels, which is supported by the World Bank.

United Nations agencies and partners are also working on a revised support plan for the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, to be launched in March next year. This plan will be evidence-based and risk-informed to meet the priority needs of people and communities in the Sahel. The plan aims to promote alternative and climate-resilient livelihood opportunities, with a special focus on restoring the ecosystems and pastoral livelihoods that are critical to Sahel economies.

It will also enhance nutrition and food security through both early action to meet immediate needs and longer-term investment. And it will contribute to the resilience of communities, increase access to education and learning opportunities, particularly for young people, support respect for human rights, strengthen governance and help to prevent violence and conflict.

The support plan includes measures to strengthen gender equality and support the region's demographic transition. Key goals are keeping girls in school, delaying their age of marriage and motherhood and increasing their opportunities to participate in the labour force.

All these measures will play a vital part in creating stability in the Sahel, and I urge the support of all Member States. The countries of the Sahel are dealing with violent extremism as they struggle with economic recession and low oil prices. They are powerful examples of the complex and multidimensional challenges that require a system-wide approach from the United Nations. Development aid and security and military responses should complement each other.

The G5 Sahel Joint Force is a concrete demonstration of the region's determination to join efforts towards tackling these multidimensional challenges. Its development dimension has been strengthened and last week's Security Council resolution included specific references to respect for human rights. As the Secretary-General has said, the force will require predictable funding, a clear political architecture and a sound political and human rights framework. Measures to ensure accountability and due process are also essential.

At the same time, we are acutely aware of the need to go beyond security measures and to support Governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Building peaceful and inclusive societies in the Sahel by strengthening the resilience of communities, shifting from delivering humanitarian aid to ending needs and preventing conflict is our shared responsibility.

We need to join our efforts to sustain peace and achieve sustainable development through a more integrated, coherent and comprehensive approach. I would like to express strong appreciation for the work undertaken by the Peacebuilding Fund in this area.

In August, a cross-border project was launched with the aim of promoting community security and social cohesion in the area shared by Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Through this project, the Peacebuilding Fund, in partnership with our mission, MINUSMA [United Nations Multidimensional

Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali], is addressing the marginalization of young people, the deficit of trust between citizens and State institutions and conflicts between herders and farmers. It is a perfect example of how development efforts, which are essential in themselves, can also contribute to peace and security.

The United Nations is committed to changing the narrative on the Sahel. We will ensure people with the appropriate skill sets and profiles are available to support countries. We have created momentum. Now we must build on it. We must mobilize our joint efforts and generate interest in this region from a wide range of investors, including the diaspora, the business community and others. We must build partnerships with key international institutions to mobilize attention and resources.

The United Nations will be at the forefront of the international response in the Sahel, through our regional, multidimensional, system-wide approach. We will continue to provide the overarching framework within which other strategies and initiatives can flourish. We count on the continued support of the Peacebuilding Commission and United Nations Member States.

Thank you.