

REPORT OF THE COALITION FOR THE SAHEL'S WORKSHOP IN THE MARGINS OF THE 8TH CONTACT GROUP

"IMPROVING THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE SAHEL: PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES"

On February 16, 2021, the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel and their international partners met at the N'Djamena Summit and expressed their desire to frame their collective commitment within a political initiative based on a spirit of partnership and mutual accountability: the Coalition for the Sahel. Today, it brings together more than 50 States and organizations. Its ambition is reflected in a consensual framework for action, known as the N'Djamena roadmap, structured around an integrated approach based on four pillars: the fight against terrorism, strengthening defense and security capacities, the deployment of the State and development.

The major changes that have taken place at the political, security and humanitarian levels since 2021 have led partners to reflect on the relevance and effectiveness of their commitment to States and organizations of the Sahel. Meanwhile, at the initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, four key members of the Coalition for the Sahel (the African Union, UN, ECOWAS, G5) have agreed to undertake a Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA) to harmonize their assessment of the situation and renew their request for support. The framework for this work, placed under the guidance of the former President of Niger H.E.M. Mahamadou Issoufou, was presented on September 22, 2022 at the 77th General Assembly of the United Nations. In this context, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission invited the High Representative of the Coalition for the Sahel to contribute, under his mandate, to the ongoing collective reflection.

On this basis, and on the occasion of the 8th Contact Group meeting of the Coalition for the Sahel, High Representative Dr. Djimé Adoum convened a workshop that offered all members of the Coalition the opportunity to present ideas and operational proposals to improve the collective management of the challenges of the Sahel. The meeting was structured around four themes that mirrored the JSA: security challenges; political and governance challenges; humanitarian, food and development challenges; the challenge of mobilization and partnerships.

This document summarizes the non-binding recommendations that resulted from this workshop. These recommendations also build on previous meetings about the Sahel which have taken place since the 77th UNGA – namely: the 8th Dakar Forum for Peace and Security in Africa, including the humanitarian briefing held at the invitation of UNOWAS and the Coalition for the Sahel, the 11th Meeting of Special Envoys for the Sahel in Prague and the 10th Steering Committee of the Sahel Alliance – as well as on the report "*Sahel, what has changed*" by the People's Coalition for the Sahel, developed by 48 NGOs involved in the region.

Session 1: Security Challenges

- **Prioritize the protection of civilians.** *The protection of civilian populations is a prerequisite for the exercise of sovereignty. The States of the Sahel need to define and implement national security strategies that respect Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and put this at the heart of public policies.*
- **Reinforce a stabilization approach.** *It is essential to articulate and synchronize military and civilian efforts to respond to the crisis. This means promoting a positive and effective presence of the State and public services, with the support of the populations of the Sahel.*

- **Limit the dispersion of security actors.** *The sovereignty of a State is based on the monopoly of legitimate violence, exercised by recognized defense and security forces throughout the territory. The proliferation of self-defense groups and the presence of mercenaries affect this capacity. It weakens regular security systems and increases the risk of inter-community clashes and violations of Human Rights and IHL, thereby creating the conditions for further conflicts. It is therefore necessary to counter this phenomenon, in accordance with the African Union Convention on the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa.*
- **Promote the transparency and accountability of all security actors.** *States confronted with terrorism and insecurity may ask for the support of external partners. All actors present in the field should be subject to an obligation of transparency with regard to the personnel involved, the legal status and the method of financing of the security tools they implement. The commitment of any actor operating in the security sector, including any regular auxiliaries of the defense and security forces, must fully comply with Human Rights standards and IHL.*
- **Support structural reforms of the security sector.** *It is important that Sahelian authorities complete and implement reforms of the defense and security forces, emphasizing transparency, accountability, predictability and sustainability of funding, the fight against corruption and nepotism, the management of human resources, procurement and compliance with Human Rights and IHL. We should continue to support technical assistance to help implement reforms while meeting the most urgent operational needs expressed (e.g. equipment, fight against improvised explosive devices).*
- **Assess security risks.** *Reinforcing a common understanding of security ensures a common understanding of collective responses. It is recommended to rely on analytical and quantitative tools in order to assess the security situation, in its various spatial scales (from local to regional), such as the Spatial Conflict Dynamics Indicator of the Sahel and West Africa Club of the OECD.*
- **Preserve regional cooperation frameworks.** *The nature of the threat remains regional, transnational and cross-border. It is essential that bilateral cooperation be consistent with regional frameworks and that the latter strengthen their articulation.*
- **Adapt existing systems to changes in the political and security context.** *The G5 Sahel remains an essential element of regional cooperation. In terms of security, the planned revision of the CONOPS of its Joint Force offers the opportunity to revitalize and redefine its modes of use following the withdrawal of Mali, while preserving the achievements in the operationalization of its human rights and IHL compliance framework.*
- **Mobilize a rapid, coordinated and effective response to stem and prevent the spread of the terrorist threat to coastal countries.** *The extension of the activities of terrorist groups in coastal countries is a reality. This worrying situation invites us to act rapidly, with measures commensurate with the challenge, to avoid a delayed, emergency mobilization oriented towards short-term and exclusively security or even all-military approaches. It is particularly important to consolidate a positive presence of the State, with basic public services and to reduce potential sources of conflict, intervening on key factors of instability such as the inequitable management of resources, notably land, and issues related to transhumance. National security enhancements should complement military efforts.*

Session 2: Political and Governance Challenges

- **Affirm governance as a top political priority.** Insecurity largely stems from a lack of good governance and representation, notably in terms of access to public services, distribution of resources, inclusiveness of institutions and respect for human rights and the rule of law. To successfully prevent terrorism, political authorities must clearly reaffirm that outlying regions and populations fully belong to the national community and implement measures that strengthen the sense of belonging, social cohesion and pacific coexistence among different communities.
- **Frame post-coup transitions within clearly defined timelines and mandates.** Transitional governments cannot replace the legitimate authorities resulting from constitutional processes to carry out all the reforms not accomplished by the previously elected governments. They remain temporary by nature and their goals are limited.
- **Respect commitments made to regional organizations.** In interstate communities based on shared norms and values, any unconstitutional change has an impact beyond the borders of the country concerned. Regional organizations like the AU, ECOWAS or ECCAS must remain the privileged frameworks for negotiation and management of transitions, in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.
- **Preserve and strengthen civic space.** The involvement of a pluralist civil society is an important condition for the implementation of political reforms during transitions and for the resolution of crises. Further efforts should be undertaken to preserve and strengthen civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and access to information, in accordance with regional and international standards.
- **Fight against misinformation.** Propaganda carried out by actors outside the region is a factor of distortion to the public information. Efforts to counter disinformation should be aimed at: (a) identifying sources of propaganda; (b) joint planning between Sahelian and international partners of actions to deconstruct "fake news"; (c) the preservation of a free media; (d) an objective and transparent presentation of the results of cooperation between partners (stratcom).
- **Strengthen the fight against the impunity of state actors.** Exactions by the regular armed forces against civilian populations constitute a security threat in the same way as the violence of the terrorist groups they are supposed to fight or exactions by self-defense militias. Ensuring that investigations into them are successful and give rise to a fair judicial process is a decisive element in rebuilding the social contract and trust in state authorities. The responsibility of political leaders and civil servants should also be investigated in such cases.
- **Strengthen the judicial system.** Ministries of Justice must be provided with sufficient resources (human, financial, material) to support local prosecutors and judicial police officers to effectively investigate and improve capacity of the judicial system to fight against impunity and corruption.
- **Reinforce operational coordination in the spirit of the triple humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP).** In order to increase the impact of actions, it is important that coordination between security, stabilization, development and humanitarian actors be adapted to local realities and follow an integrated approach involving public authorities and civil society. To this end, it is proposed to support the HDP initiative led jointly by CILSS, the "Global Network against Food Crisis", the European Union and the SWAC/OECD in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Chad.

Session 3: Humanitarian, food security and development challenges

- **Promote the principles of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL).** This notably implies: (a) respecting the neutrality of humanitarian actors, allowing them to negotiate with all parties to conflicts; and (b) facilitating the movement of humanitarian workers and access to fragile areas for development actors and limiting the use of armed escorts for humanitarian workers to strictly necessary cases.
- **Ensure adequate funding for humanitarian actors, notably national and local NGOs.** The financing of the latter remains well below commitments. They are, however, on the front line of the response to the humanitarian needs of deprived populations, because they often have better knowledge of the needs of inhabitants and territories that are more difficult to access.
- **Strengthen civil-military coordination mechanisms** in order to: (a) ensure better protection of civilians; (b) preserve a clear distinction of mandates; (c) create the conditions for the monitoring of the decisions taken in these mechanisms and (d) ensure that the training provided to the armed forces includes awareness raising on human rights, humanitarian principles, IHL and the protection of women and children.
- **Scale up the achievements of an integrated territorial approach.** Following the conclusions of the previous session, this also means: (a) to strengthen dialogue and, where possible, operational cooperation between various actors involved in each area to better articulate actions within their mandates; (b) to develop response mechanisms and promote flexible projects and implementation modalities according to national and local contexts; (c) to continue to support local authorities and decentralized basic services in order to strengthen their legitimacy as providers of public services.
- **Increase collective action in prevention areas,** in particular to limit the expansion of the crisis towards coastal countries, by maintaining support to the most vulnerable areas.
- **Strengthen technical and financial coordination within the G5 countries and between them and their partners.** This involves monitoring the commitments of the N'Djamena roadmap and its national committees with a view to: (a) strengthening inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms within each State and improving the implementation of crosscutting prevention and response policies; (b) improving coordination between governments and partners in each State; and (c) strengthening coordination between governments in the region.
- **Strengthen the complementarity between emergency and development actions in fragile areas for both an immediate and long-term response, contributing to a sustainable socio-economic impact.** It is necessary to: (a) ensure an immediate response to crises that is on the scale of emergency needs, by mobilizing all partners and instruments according to their mandates and added value; (b) strengthen the capacity of national systems to respond to the crisis; (c) support job creation, especially for women and young people; (d) develop human capital by strengthening access to education, professional and vocational training and integration; (e) consolidate access to basic services; and (f) promote food self-sufficiency through local production.
- **Promote better economic and commercial integration of the Sahel with its neighbours.** For increased prosperity, it is important to strengthen main sectors between the Sahel and coastal areas of West and North Africa. Trans-Saharan lines of communication deserve particular emphasis in this respect, given the commercial complementarity of these two regions in key economic sectors, such as raw materials or cattle.

Session 4: The challenge of mobilization and partnerships

- **Rely on strategic approaches formulated and implemented by Sahelian countries.** Better mobilizing partnerships means above all to be able to rely on the strategies of Sahelian countries and organizations. These strategies and the resulting actions must be specific, complementary and autonomous, in the political and financial sense.
- **Ensure full coherence and synergy of the Joint UN-AU-ECOWAS-G5 Strategic Assessment with existing multilateral frameworks and ongoing assessment exercises.** Given its ambition, it is important that this exercise take into account the strategic orientations expressed by the main multilateral frameworks active in the Sahel, notably the roadmap of the Coalition for the Sahel updated in July 2022. It is also appropriate that the JSA integrate the conclusions of the strategic review of MINUSMA conducted under the auspices of the Secretary General of the United Nations, which should be made public in January 2023, and of the ongoing review of the CONOPS of the Joint Force. Particular attention may be paid to ongoing work within the EU.
- **Optimize security cooperation initiatives.** Regional cooperation must be part of a partnership, based on efficiency, mutual accountability and an approach of subsidiarity. It appears urgent to define an effective articulation between the various regional initiatives existing or being planned (G5 Joint Force, Accra Initiative Force, ECOWAS Standby Force, AU Multinational Force, the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin Commission) in order to avoid duplications or overlaps detrimental to collective efficiency.
- **Limit the direct intervention of external partners.** The benefit of external interventions by regular armed forces must be assessed in a logic of subsidiarity. Regional and international actors must only intervene if: (a) a neutral actor is required to intervene (e.g. a peacekeeping force); (b) local actors are unable to react; and (c) numerical and technical superiority is necessary to counter the threat.
- **Base the request for external security support on clear and accepted legal bases.** The interventions of external partners can only be in support of the efforts of the Sahel countries themselves. They must be legally based on: (a) an explicit request from the States concerned or (b) a resolution of the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
- **Define a common policy and regulatory framework for intervention.** Cooperation between Sahelian and international partners should abide by common values and rules of engagement. These include requirements for transparency and respect for international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights.
- **Optimize the effectiveness of external support.** The prime condition for the efficiency of any regional organization lies in the effective commitment of its members to finance and politically orient it. External security interventions must therefore be simpler, more flexible and more agile and should focus on supporting actions rather than institutions.
- **Understand the Sahel in a broader geographical framework.** Sahelian challenges must be addressed from a perspective and an analysis of interconnections with coastal and North African countries. In addition, Nigeria, which concentrates half of the violence perpetrated in North and West Africa, deserves to occupy a greater place in the Sahelian strategies of international partners.
- **Draw lessons from successful experiences of regional cooperation, e.g. the MNJTF of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace in Niger, the AGRHYMET Centre of CILSS and the G5 Defense College.**