



EXPERTS' MEETING ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION /
FOLLOW-UP TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
JOINT AU-UN ASSESSMENT MISSION

ADDIS ABABA, 14 – 15 MARCH 2012

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS OF THE AU-UN EXPERTS MEETING ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION

1. At the initiative of the Commission of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) Secretariat, an experts' meeting on the situation in the Sahel region was held in Addis Ababa, from 14 to 15 March 2012. The meeting was convened in follow-up to the relevant decisions of the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) and the UN Security Council (UNSC), as well as to the outcome of the ministerial-level consultation among the countries of the region and other stakeholders, held in Addis Ababa, on 29 January 2012, which considered the report and recommendations of the joint AU-UN multidisciplinary mission to the Sahel, undertaken from 7 to 23 December 2011, to assess the impact of the Libyan crisis on the countries of the region.

2. The meeting was attended by the countries of the Sahel region and other concerned/interested African countries, namely: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Togo and Tunisia. The following relevant Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolutions (RECs/RMs) and other regional organizations and entities also attended the meeting: the Community of the Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the North Africa Regional Capability (NARC), the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Sahel Fusion and Liaison Unit (FLU), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

3. Participants also included the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), the UN Support Mission in Libya -(UNSMIL), the UN Office in West Africa (UNOWA), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Country Team in Niger, the European Union (EU), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC). Other participants included France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States , as permanent members of the UNSC; Turkey, as co-chair of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF); and Canada, as co-chair of the GCTF Working Group on Sahel.

4. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- (i) take stock of ongoing efforts and initiatives to address the challenges facing the region;
- (ii) review the recommendations of the joint assessment mission and agree on how best to complement the ongoing efforts by the region and enhance existing support programs;

- (iii) agree on priority actions in the following three areas: (a) security and diplomacy, (b) humanitarian and socio-economic aspects, including reintegration into their countries of origin of migrant workers who left Libya as a result of the situation that developed in that country last year, and (c) long term development;
- (iv) formulate the outline of a comprehensive plan of action that would facilitate a coordinated support, by the AU and its Member States, the UN and the international community as a whole, to the efforts of the countries of the region; and
- (v) agree on modalities for enhanced coordination among all stakeholders and effective follow-up of the recommendations that would emerge from the meeting.

5. In their discussions, the participants stressed that the Sahel region was faced by multiple challenges, in particular terrorism and transnational organized crime, proliferation of weapons, illicit trafficking and latent armed conflicts, as well as environmental degradation and climate change, food insecurity and nutrition crisis. The participants noted that these challenges were compounded by the Libyan crisis, in particular the influx of hundreds of thousands of traumatized and impoverished returnees, as well as the inflow of unspecified and unquantifiable numbers of arms and ammunition from the Libyan arsenal, providing a source of armament to terrorist and criminal groups in the region.

6. The participants noted that, over the past few years, the countries of the region have made sustained efforts, both individually and collectively, to address the challenges facing them. In this respect, they commended the institutional mechanisms established, at various levels, by the core countries of Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger: political (with regular consultations at ministerial level), intelligence (with the Algiers-based FLU), military (with the Tamanrasset-based Joint Military Command Centre - CEMOC) and economic cooperation and development. They commended the progress being made in the implementation of the Strategy adopted at the High-Level Conference on Security, Development and Partnership between the core countries and the external partners, held in Algiers, from 7 to 8 September 2011. They stressed that these mechanisms are meant to enlarge their membership. The participants commended the other existing bilateral cooperative arrangements among the core countries and in the rest of the region. They further commended ECOWAS for its continued efforts towards the promotion of peace, security, stability and development in the region, including follow up action to the relevant provisions of the communiqué adopted at its 40th summit held in Abuja from 16 to 17 February 2012. They also noted the role played by CEN-SAD. Finally, they welcomed the convening, at the initiative of the Libyan Government, of a regional ministerial conference on border security, in Tripoli, from 11 to 12 March 2012, which made important recommendations.

7. The participants noted that a number of partners were active on the ground providing security, humanitarian and development support. In this respect, they commended the UN agencies for their continued work in the areas of humanitarian assistance, governance and development. They equally welcomed the support provided by the EU and

its Member States within the framework of its Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, adopted on 21 March 2011. They also noted the support provided by a number of bilateral partners, in particular the US, including efforts to mitigate the threat of the Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) and other capacity-building initiatives, as well as actions undertaken by the GCTF Sahel Working Group.

8. Aware of the fact that recent developments have exacerbated and negatively affected the political, security, social and economic situation in the Sahel region, the participants underlined the need for renewed, enhanced and better-coordinated efforts to assist the concerned countries in implementing their nationally- and regionally-developed strategies, in order to successfully address the challenges at hand. In this respect, they agreed that the international efforts, which should accompany and support the efforts of the countries of the region, should be informed by the need to:

- (i) develop and implement a comprehensive approach dealing with all the issues at stake, particularly terrorism, armed rebellions, transnational organized crime, illicit proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and other armaments, food insecurity, and tackling root causes of conflict, such as poverty, youth unemployment, environmental degradation and climate change, governance challenges and chronic under-development. It is understood that appropriate solutions should be found for each of the issues the region is grappling with and efforts made to maximize their positive impact on the overall situation;
- (ii) promote and enhance national and regional ownership and leadership, in order to ensure sustainability and efficiency. The role of the international community is to support and strengthen existing efforts and initiatives, and avoid their duplication, help fill gaps when identified and ensure sustained international attention;
- (iii) promote close coordination and collaboration among the variety of actors involved, to maximize collective impact, avoid duplication of effort and waste of scarce resources;
- (iv) promote an action and result-oriented approach aimed at achieving concrete and measurable results on the ground, through effective follow-up and timely implementation of commitments made; and
- (v) enhance the support provided by the international community for it to be commensurate with the needs on the ground, as identified by the countries concerned in their nationally-developed programs and strategies or within the framework of existing mechanisms.

9. The participants welcomed the recommendations of the AU-UN joint assessment mission, which provide a good basis for a complementary, coherent and coordinated

approach to the challenges in the Sahel region. More specifically, they agreed on the following:

A. INVENTORY OF EXISTING EFFORTS AND INITIATIVES

10. Given the need to ensure timely exchange of information and proper coordination, the participants agreed that immediate steps should be taken by the AU and the UN to prepare an inventory of all existing initiatives and efforts. This inventory should be updated regularly and circulated to all stakeholders. The countries of the region, relevant regional organisations and entities, as well as bilateral and multilateral partners should provide regular updates on their efforts. The first draft inventory should be ready within one month from the date of the present meeting.

B. SECURITY AND DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS

11. The participants expressed concern over the prevailing security situation in the Sahel, which is shaped by the intertwined threats of terrorism, transnational organized crime, human trafficking and armed groups/conflict. They noted that the human and operational capacity of terrorist and other non-state armed groups had dramatically increased with the proliferation of all types of arms, explosives and ammunition, including surface-to-air-missiles and MANPADS, as a direct consequence of the Libyan crisis, through a well-organized network of illicit traffickers.

12. Accordingly, the participants, having welcomed the offers for training and capacity-building made by some countries of the region, in particular Egypt, called for continued efforts to address the prevailing security challenges. Building on the steps taken by the region, the AU and the UN, as well as by relevant partners, these should include:

- (i) support to, and strengthening of, the UFL and the CEMOC, in particular by availing the required logistical support and intelligence, as well as adequate communication infrastructure. The AU, in particular through the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), working with international partners, should facilitate the mobilization of such support. In addition, the participants encouraged other countries in the larger region to develop, where required, strategies and mechanisms similar to those established by the core countries;
- (ii) renewed and concerted military efforts, by the countries of the region, to destroy terrorists and non-state armed groups' sanctuaries, logistics and infrastructure, as well as targeted awareness raising campaigns towards the youth, through religious leaders and institutions;
- (iii) enhanced information exchange among all the countries concerned, in particular through the network of ACSRT national and regional Focal Points. In this respect, ACSRT should convene regular and special meetings of the ACSRT Focal Points from the region, notably on the margins of its annual Focal Points meetings;

- (iv) enhanced border security, taking advantage of the existing capacity-building initiatives by UN agencies, bilateral partners and the steps agreed to at the Tripoli Ministerial Regional Conference on Border Security, as well as of the framework provided by the AU Border Programme (AUBP) and other related initiatives;
- (v) closer and stronger partnership among the ACSRT, the relevant RECs/RMs, the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and UNODC, as well as the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, the GCTF and other relevant stakeholders. The participants stressed the importance of the assessment missions conducted by the ACSRT and the CTED and the need to ensure their effective follow-up.

13. The issue of the payment of ransom for the release of hostages featured prominently in the deliberations. The countries of the region stressed that the payment of ransom has become a major source of financing which enables terrorist groups to buy support from local populations, acquire the necessary logistics and infrastructure and recruit new elements, in addition to criminalizing local economies. The countries of the region, therefore, reiterated the need to effectively prohibit the payment of ransom to terrorist groups, as stressed in AU decision Assembly/AU/Dec.256 (XIII), and thus urged the partners to extend full support to this end.

14. The participants noted that, since the finalization of the Joint UN - AU Assessment Mission Report, the fragile security situation in Northern Mali has significantly deteriorated as a result of the continued attacks by armed rebels, many of whom were returnees from Libya, against Government forces. This has compounded the already precarious humanitarian situation in the area, including the displacement of populations within Mali (IDPs) and to neighboring countries (refugees), and undermined development efforts.

15. The participants underscored the urgency of addressing the situation, bearing in mind the unacceptability of the use of force in a democratic country where political struggle can be pursued peacefully and the need to respect the unity and territorial integrity of Mali. They looked forward to the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the AU-PSC scheduled to take place in Bamako, on 20 March 2012.

C. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, FOOD SECURITY AND REINSERTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

16. The participants exchanged in depth on the serious humanitarian situation in the region and the recurring food crises, which result from a combination of drought, high grain prices, environmental degradation, chronic poverty and under-investment in agriculture, livestock and natural resources sectors. The participants noted with concern the drop in cereal production in the region by 25 to 50 % in 2011, compared to 2010, which has created a deficit of more than 3.7 million tones. This is in addition to the severe fodder shortage that threatens livestock in the region. There are 13.4 million vulnerable persons of which over 10 million are already facing food insecurity, while over 1 million children are at risk of severe

acute malnutrition. The participants noted that early response to the needs of the affected populations has been launched on the basis of national strategies and the regional humanitarian strategy for response to the food security and nutrition crisis.

17. The participants noted that vulnerable communities are further suffering from the loss of income from remittances which were previously sent by migrant workers in Libya. By the end of 2011, the IOM had registered 209,030 returnees in Niger, Chad, Mali and Mauritania. These figures do not include those who have crossed the border without IOM's assistance, who are estimated at 211,000. The large number of returnees places further strain on the already vulnerable communities. In addition, more than 150,000 people have fled the fighting in the northern part of Mali, with half of them having crossed the borders to seek refuge in the neighboring countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger) and beyond. The number of refugees is increasing on a daily basis, as the fighting intensifies the participants expressed deep appreciation to those countries for opening their borders to receive the fleeing Malians and for the support being provided. This situation has added further strain on already vulnerable host communities. They also expressed appreciation to the UN and other humanitarian agencies extending support on the ground.

18. The participants noted that the response to the current challenges appear to be more encouraging than in previous years. In particular, the affected countries have taken steps to address the situation, both nationally and regionally, including the signing by 17 countries from the region (ECOWAS plus Chad and Mauritania), in November 2011, of a Charter on Food Crisis Management and Prevention. The participants also commended the partner countries and institutions that have already provided assistance. At the same time, they noted, with deep concern, that the funds mobilized so far remain far short of the needs, which are estimated to be between 724 to 930 million dollars.

19. The participants called on all concerned States to identify the national institutions responsible for coordination of humanitarian assistance, in order to avoid duplication. They stressed the need for all concerned actors to respond to the immediate needs and to act for the long term, in order to both lessen the current hardships and prevent the occurrence of future crisis. These would include:

- (i) speedy mobilization and disbursement by all concerned actors of sufficient funding to support national emergency response plans, taking into account the funding gaps already identified in the national and regional strategies;
- (ii) ensuring the appropriateness of interventions including targeting the most vulnerable groups in the most affected areas, so that they strengthen people's livelihoods and resilience before the peak of the crisis ;
- (iii) ensuring the safety of affected populations, including IDPs and refugees, access to humanitarian assistance by the populations that are affected by the food and nutrition crisis (IDPs, refugees and returning migrant workers), the provision by the countries concerned of security and safety for humanitarian workers, as well

as the relocation of refugees from border areas to safer sites to be provided by the countries concerned, in line with AU and UN guidelines;

- (iv) promoting effective coordination among all countries to ensure the full functioning of regional markets and flow of populations;
- (v) designing and implementing long-term interventions to reduce the chronic vulnerability of people in the region to future crises, including investment in sustainable agriculture, disaster risk reduction programmes, establishment of food reserves, social protection/safety nets, community-based water resource management and the development of national, regional and community-based food reserves. Critical in this respect is the provision of adequate support to the efforts by ECOWAS to put in place emergency food reserves and invest in long-term safety net programmes.

20. The participants, while appealing to the international partners for increased assistance, stressed the imperative of greater mobilization and support by African countries in the spirit of continental solidarity. In this respect, they welcomed the assistance extended by ECOWAS, AU and individual African countries. They recommended the early convening by the AU, with the support of the relevant UN agencies, of a pledging conference to mobilize African support for the victims of the food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel region.

21. Regarding more specifically the situation of the migrant workers, the participants called for greater efforts to facilitate their reintegration and reinsertion and assist host communities. They recommended that the AU and the UN explore the possibility of jointly convening a resource mobilization round table to support programmes for the migrant workers. They also recommended the establishment of a Fund.

D. LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT

22. The participants recognized that a sustainable solution to the humanitarian, food and nutritional crisis, environmental and security challenges facing the region requires renewed commitment to the human and economic development of the countries concerned. Focus should be placed on support to and investment in the agriculture and livestock sectors, including building resilience through climate adaptation; development of human capital, through education and skills development; youth employment; gender; investment in social services (health and protection), and infrastructure; as well as continued improvements in governance. In this regard, the participants stressed the primary role of the countries of the region, as well as the key contribution of development partners.

23. The participants acknowledged the need to link immediate responses to the multifaceted crisis to longer-term development efforts, and to take into account the security and development nexus, among others, through a comprehensive understanding of capacity development at all levels, as well as by addressing state and peace building challenges to enhance service delivery to the people and long-term stabilization. Emphasis should be placed on inclusive growth and equity, by:

- (i) promoting a holistic approach to capacity building at local, national, regional and international levels, to enhance responses for service delivery in health, education, security, rebuilding of public services, and governance;
- (ii) boosting the economic development and reconstruction efforts, through job creation and promotion of youth employment (short and long-term solutions), supported by reform processes, private sector, with support to Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), economic diversification, access to decentralized financial services, and development of small and medium-scale infrastructure linked to high intensive labor;
- (iii) supporting the member states affected by the crisis in the Sahel in their effort to put in practice the MDGs' acceleration framework and to identify their priorities in the state and peace building; and
- (iv) enhancing people's resilience to crises through community-based initiatives, in particular support to, and investments in, agriculture and livestock sectors, linked to a comprehensive approach to the different dimensions of human security.

24. In order to increase the impact and the effectiveness of joint engagement in the region, there is a need for enhanced coordination among intervening partners, clear division of labor and reinforced complementarities, linked to national frameworks and action plans. The participants requested NEPAD, the AfDB and the UNECA, in collaboration with relevant regional and international institutions, to make concrete proposals on the best way forward.

E. FOLLOW UP

25. The participants agreed that the support and accompaniment of the efforts of the countries of the region should be sustained, if tangible results are to be achieved and difference made on the ground. Accordingly, they encouraged the AU and the UN to regularly convene similar consultations, to facilitate exchange of information among all stakeholders, enhance coordination of efforts and initiatives undertaken on the ground, achieve coherence and cost efficiency, and sustain international attention and support for the countries of the region and the priorities set by them, and help the AU and UN policy making organs better target their decisions and actions.

26. In addition, and following the positive outcome of the ministerial-level consultation of 29 January, the participants recommended that Ministers of the concerned countries should meet as and when necessary on the margins of the AU Summits, to take stock of progress made in this regard.

27. The participants agreed that the AU and UN should elaborate an appropriate implementation plan to guide and enhance the support by the international community to the national and regional efforts and initiatives.