

Launch of the 2021-2022 United Nations Multi-Year Appeal for Counter-Terrorism

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Remarks from Ms. Barbara Rijks – IOM Niger

“Strengthening the capacities of Sahelian governments towards more effective border management and collaboration”, Ms. Barbara Rijks, Head of Mission, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Niger

It is an honour for IOM to participate in this important seminar with distinguished experts, representatives from governments in the Sahel region and donor agencies. I will focus my short intervention on the importance of effective border management and cross-border collaboration in the Sahel, in the context of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on measures to prevent and combat terrorism.

The first question we should ask is: why is effective border management so critical to prevent and combat terrorism in the Sahel?

As most of you know, the frequent attacks on civilians and security forces by violent extremist organisations (VEOs) in the tri-border area between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso (often referred to as Liptako Gourma) and Lake Chad Basin region are taking place in fragile, often remote, border areas without a strong, permanent presence of state actors, including security forces.

Porous borders facilitate the spread of terrorism and enables transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons, drugs, counterfeit medicine and arms. There are already links between terrorist organisations and armed groups involved in transnational organized crime.

While much of the focus is rightfully placed on Liptako Gourma and Lake Chad Basin regions, I would also like to draw your attention to the recent intensification of attacks and conflict along the south-western border of Niger and the corridor of the Central Mediterranean Route in general. Although, these attacks have not been attributed to VEOs, they have generated high levels of insecurity and displacement of communities living in border areas, similar to what we have witnessed in Liptako Gourma and Lake Chad regions, putting additional pressure on already depleted resources. The security along the Niger-Nigeria border is critical as it connects the regions of Liptako Gourma and the Lake Chad Basin. This situation is of particular concern, considering the ongoing activities of VEOs in the Sahel and the vulnerability of the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea, to extremist activities. Burkina Faso, a landlocked state, which shares southern borders with Gulf of Guinea countries and depends economically on the seaports of Ghana and Togo is increasingly threatened by violent extremism that can potentially spread across the region to the coastal States.

Therefore, ensuring secure, well managed, borders areas is critical in supporting the fight against terrorism and transnational crime.

What are the key challenges to securing borders in this region?

Firstly, with many competing challenges and the vastness of their territories, governments in the Sahel struggle to provide basic services and communicate with local communities in remote border areas, where the security forces coverage is variable due to affectations and rotations. The lack of sustainable interaction between communities and local authorities, including law enforcement actors, inhibits trust

and confidence in the authorities. As a result of the absence of communication, law enforcement agencies lack understanding of the risks and threats facing border communities and miss out on opportunities to address them, while the border communities do not feel certain that the authorities will provide protection in case of need.

Second, border management systems in the region are not yet able to systematically collect digital information and share it in real time between the central and local levels, as well as with neighbouring governments, which would greatly enhance an effective response, trends analysis, risk assessment and intelligence in general. With the lengthy, porous borders, it is also critical to look beyond the official border crossings and ensure border control between border posts through mobile border patrols, which is being done in Niger, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso.

How will IOM's regional project address these challenges and contribute to Pillar 2 of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy GCTS, i.e. measures to prevent and combat terrorism?

The regional project is built on the strong partnerships between IOM with the national border management authorities in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, as well regional entities such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Further, the focus and priorities of this project have been informed by the CTED assessments that have been completed in all 4 countries and the joint IOM-UNOCT workshop with border management authorities from Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, that focused on cross border threats in the Park Ws areas in West Africa.

The project has three distinct, but inter-connected objectives:

Through the **first** objective, the intervention aims to strengthen the relationship between law enforcement agencies and border communities, including informal community leaders, in strategic border areas in the four targeted countries. This is done through a Community Engagement & Policing approach which helps to avert cross-border crime, identify security issues and build common ownership of local challenges. This approach, which has been used by IOM in the region since 2015, creates an environment in which communities and local stakeholders are not seen as part of the problem by the state, but as part of the solution.

This community-focused approach is complemented **by the 2nd component**, that ensures that security forces are better able to control cross-border movements, through the Migration Information Data Analysis System (MIDAS). This Border Management Information System collects biographic and biometric data of cross-border travellers and shares this data automatically with their respective capitals, including inter-operability with INTERPOL databases. MIDAS has been adopted in all four target countries for official crossing points at land borders and allows greater analysis and anticipation of modus operandi of criminals and terrorists.

Building on the first two objectives and to bring viable and durable solutions to the region, **the third component** will establish localised cross border platforms to facilitate joint approaches and responses between the target countries. As the communities living on both sides of the border often share the same culture, ethnicity, and language, any effective approach towards community engagement should consider either side of the border. It is also envisioned that data sharing mechanisms are established between the law enforcement authorities from neighbouring countries to assist in joint investigations and in identifying cross-border crime and networks.

Lastly, I would like to stress that **gender considerations** are at the heart of the proposed intervention from the strategic management level to addressing the needs of vulnerable female migrants and minors identified at border crossings. For example, there will be proactive outreach to key actors, such as Associations of Female Police Officers, to increase the number of female police officers in the target countries and ensure their participation in strategic decision making. Special attention is also placed on training women in border communities on their critical role in identifying security risks, building peace

and maintaining social cohesion. Additionally, targeted trainings and cross border SOPs will focus on the protection of migrants, decrease in human rights violations at the border, and increased detection and protection of victims of human trafficking and smuggling (who are often female).

I'll stop here. I am glad to take questions.