

## **Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the Sahel region and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)**

**14 October 2020  
Chair's Summary**

1. On 14 October, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held a virtual Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Sahel region and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). The meeting was convened by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, Chair of the PBC. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the recent developments and trends in the Sahel, to update on the status of implementation of UNISS, and mobilize further support for peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts.
2. The Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovanie Biha, informed that the UN, in line with the priorities of the UNISS, has been working with governments, regional bodies and other partners to adapt to the shifting environment and to ensure that UN actions have an impact on those who are most affected by the multi-layered crisis in the Sahel. She added that the security situation remained a serious concern. By August 2020, the region had recorded the same number of fatalities for the totality of 2019. The impact on the political, security, economic, and humanitarian dynamics in Sahelian countries underscored the need for a greater effort to ensure a concerted and coordinated approach of the UN. In this regard, she explained, UN engagement in the Sahel has focused on supporting countries to ensure effective governance based on political inclusion, the rule of law and accountability. A key part of UNISS is focused on cross border cooperation programmes, especially in providing support to populations in periphery zones. She recognized the important contributions of PBF's cross-border programming, which has supported local authorities on opposite sides of border zones to coordinate and cooperate. She stressed that it is imperative to scale up resources, including through effective partnerships, to promote cross-border and regional collaboration for peace and stability, and other priorities of the UNISS.
3. The World Bank Vice-President for Western and Central Africa, Mr. Ousmane Diagana, noted the myriad challenges facing the region, including terrorism, conflicts, displacements, climate change and demographic growth, with 1.2 million new entrants each year in the market seeking jobs and economic opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has undermined the progress made in the fight against poverty over the past 25 years, which was already suffering from increased security expenditures. The Bank is supporting Sahelian countries experiencing Fragility, Violence and Conflict (FCV) with financial support of US\$8.5 billion through the IDA 19 facility over the next three years (2020-2023). Two important priorities in the region are women's empowerment and energy, including promotion of sustainable practices in the agricultural sector. He informed that four out of the five Sahel countries, namely, Burkina Faso,

Chad, Mali and Mauritania, are potentially eligible to the Prevention and Resilience Allocation (PRA), which supports national strategies for conflict risk mitigation. He emphasized the importance of ensuring close cooperation between peacebuilding, humanitarian and development actors in the Sahel, to strengthen regional coordination between the actors in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali and to make sure that development and humanitarian efforts are aligned with the broader peacebuilding agenda.

4. The UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, outlined challenges and opportunities in the implementation of UNISS and its support plan and stressed the need for strengthened partnerships between international, regional and sub-regional actors. She highlighted activities under the three pillars of UNISS, security, governance, and resilience. On security, UNDP has been working with UNODC to address the proliferation of small arms and ammunition, with the collection of 38,000 weapons and ammunitions in the cross-border communities of Niger and Nigeria. On the governance pillar, UNDP is working closely with UN Resident Coordinators to help address electoral, political and governance issues, including through support for the provision of basic infrastructure and services and the revitalization of local economies in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad Basin areas. On resilience, the UN supports efforts in seven out of ten UNISS countries who have set voluntary targets to halt land degradation by 2030. In Mauritania and Niger, the UN has trained thousands of refugees and host population in market-based livelihoods in order to encourage resilience and sustainability. She urged for predictable financing for the continuation of these and other similar initiatives under the umbrella of UNISS.
5. The Regional Coordinator of the G5 Sahel Women's Platform, Ms. Nana Aïcha Cissé, underscored the major threats to peace and development in region and to the protection of women's rights and empowerment. She explained that the effects of political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have resulted in an increase in terrorism and forced displacements of the population. She added that it was crucial to increase the involvement of women in the different mechanisms and strategies in the Sahel and to ensure their participation in and contributions to peace processes, which is an essential condition for their long-term success. She recommended that more needs to be done to strengthen synergy between the various stakeholders in the Sahel. She urged for more action to enhance cooperation and build confidence between civilian populations and defense and security forces. She asked the international community to boost support for women's networks, whose efforts at the grassroots level to promote human security and sustainable development are usually undervalued if not unnoticed. She also called for systematic monitoring of collective efforts to implement the women, peace and security agenda in the Sahel.

6. The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Mr. Oscar Fernández-Taranco, stressed the need to ensure that women, youth and the displaced are not left behind in efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in regions most affected by conflict and violence. He underlined that financing for the COVID-19 socio-economic recovery in the G5-Sahel countries provides an opportunity to act on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and that International Financial Institutions have an important role to play in that regard. He emphasized the importance of applying a prevention lens across all development and humanitarian efforts in the Sahel. He informed that the PBF has approved investments of USD \$137 million in 10 countries engaged in UNISS, representing 25% of the Fund's resources between 2017-2019.
  
7. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
  - The immense security, humanitarian and development needs in the Sahel, including the adverse impacts of climate change in the region, require a scaling up in resource mobilization and support from the international community to ensure that the security, governance and resilience dimensions of the multi-layered crisis in the region are adequately addressed, particularly in the G5 Sahel sub-region.
  
  - The need for additional financing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts in the Sahel countries provides an opportunity to promote coherent and coordinated international action on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It also requires strengthened partnerships to maximize the comparative advantages of international, regional and sub-regional actors. In that regard, the Commission welcomed the enhanced collaboration between the United Nations and the World Bank for joint data and analysis in the Sahel.
  
  - Recognizing that the pandemic had reversed progress in gender equality, and that women and youth should be at the forefront of recovery and peacebuilding efforts, the Commission called for more robust action in support of populations in need and for empowering the region's women and youth to play a leading role.
  
  - The Commission recognized UNOWAS' political guidance and the UN system-wide efforts to improve coherence, as well as the catalytic support of the PBF for UNISS implementation. They stressed the need to continue to work closely with the Ministerial Coordination Platform of the Sahel and the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel, and called for further harmonization of the different strategies in support of the region, particularly the countries of the G5 Sahel.

- The Commission recognized the need for stronger support for the implementation of the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Program, which now also includes activities to help address the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan also includes additional confidence building measures between military and security forces and the population, an important priority for women in the region.
- The principles of national ownership and leadership were highlighted, together with a focus on strengthening governance processes through institutional and capacity building.