

Peacebuilding Commission

Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Sahel

23 June 2023

Chair's Summary

On 23 June 2023, the Peacebuilding Commission convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on peacebuilding in the context of transnational organized crime, terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel and the efforts necessary to address the root causes of these drivers of insecurity and instability. The meeting's briefers included the Regional Representative for West and Central Africa of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Chief of Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and the Vice-President of *Association des Femmes Cheffes de famille* (AFCF). The members of the Commission noted with concern the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel and its spillover effects and underscored the importance of addressing the underlying drivers of instability and insecurity in the region, including poverty, food insecurity, forced displacement, lack of socio-economic opportunities, corruption, and climate change. They stressed the need to strengthen the social contract, governance, institution-building, reconciliation, socio-economic opportunities, and resilience to climate-related risks. Further, they highlighted the importance of national and regional strategies and recognized implementation challenges as a key obstacle to peace and sustainable development. They underscored the importance of context- and community-based approaches and inclusive and local solutions to preventing terrorism and violent extremism as well as organized crime.

1. On 23 June 2023, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonović, convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on peacebuilding in the context of transnational organized crime, terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel and the efforts necessary to address the root causes of these drivers of insecurity and instability.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair recognized the importance of coherent and sustained security, political, socio-economic development and peacebuilding efforts in the Sahel. He noted the structural drivers, including institutional fragility, weak governance, poverty, porous borders, rapid population growth, mass migration and climate change, that are contributing to instability and insecurity in the region and creating conditions conducive to the organized crime and illicit economic activities, terrorism and violent extremism. He stressed working across the full peace continuum, addressing root causes of conflict and drivers of instability, ensuring good governance, rule of law, respect for human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development based on adequate resources, as prerequisite for lasting peace and security in the Sahel.
3. **Mr. Amado de Andres, Regional Representative for West and Central Africa of UNODC**, noted that while linkages between peacebuilding and terrorism and violent extremism have been well explored, the links between peacebuilding and organized crime are often forgotten. In that regard, he informed of UNODC's transnational threat assessment of organized crime in the Sahel (TOCTA), which indicates that transnational organized crime largely impacts human

rights, governance and development in the Sahel, thereby challenging peacebuilding efforts. He detailed that research has indicated that criminal groups exploit the needs of the population and the structural vulnerabilities of the region exposing populations to human right abuses, including through exploitative working conditions, substandard medical care, and an unhealthy and non-sustainable environment. Moreover, he explained that organized crime fuels corruption, erodes people's trust in state institutions and undermines state legitimacy. He underscored that organized crime undermines Sahelian development by hampering the growth of the private sector and by depriving the public sector of significant tax revenue, limiting the resources available to States to fund welfare systems and drive economic development. He stressed that the intersection of organized crime with peacebuilding is complex and should be assessed carefully with a Do No Harm Approach. In that regard, the TOCTA findings can be used to design effective and sustainable peacebuilding responses. He underscored that preventing and combating organized crime in the Sahel cannot be achieved by security responses alone, recommending that peacebuilding efforts must address the multi-faceted impacts of organized crime. Lastly, he informed of the UNODC's support to the Sahelian countries, including data collection on organized crime to inform evidenced-based policy making and programming; efforts to strengthen legal and policy frameworks in line with the conventions on drugs and crime; technical support to deter and prevent crime; and efforts to protect victims and ensure their access to services, such as justice and health.

4. **Mr. Muhammad Rafiuddin Shah, Chief of Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination of UNOCT**, informed that despite substantial counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel, the situation continues to deteriorate. He noted that Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates are exploiting the multi-faceted challenges facing the region, including armed conflict as well as environmental, political, and socio-economic fragilities. He recommended to rethink counter-terrorism responses and underscored prevention as the most effective approach. He added that while military and law enforcement responses are necessary, they are not sufficient to defeat terrorism and could be counter-productive if not firmly anchored in the rule of law and human rights. Further, he underlined the importance of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, and informed of the new UN Joint Appeal for Counter-Terrorism in Africa, which will incentivize a new generation of joint UN system action for a more visible, transparent and effective multilateral contribution to the implementation of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in Africa. He reiterated UNOCT's commitment to supporting Member States, regional organizations, and other relevant actors to build resilience, tackle the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, and promote sustainable peace and development, including through capacity-building support to both Sahel and Gulf of Guinea countries. He also informed of enhancing support to Member States for interagency coordination, protecting vulnerable targets, strengthening parliamentary engagement, and the prosecution, rehabilitation, reintegration of persons associated with terrorist groups.
5. **Mrs. Ba Aminata Couro Ly, First Vice-President of AFCF**, briefed on the Mourchidate network which is a women's network that focuses on preventing violent extremism and defending human rights in Mauritania and border areas. In collaboration with the UNODC, the Mauritanian Ministry for Islamic Affairs, and religious actors, the network trained 50 women and girls to raise awareness among communities on alternatives to violent extremism. She

underlined the importance of cultural and religious understanding and knowledge, and engagement with influential community leaders to combat radicalization. As a result of the network's outreach and awareness-raising campaigns, more than 7600 women and girls learned about alternatives to radical and violent speech. She underlined the network's efforts in prisons, where the spread of violent extremism has been considerable. Further, she informed of establishing early-warning systems between the border of Mali and Senegal to flag suspicious cases to the security forces, as well as the support to the young victims of terrorism to ease their reintegration to normal life. In that regard, the Mourchidate network has contributed to strengthening social cohesion, religious tolerance and preventing extremism, as well as empowering women to prevent violent extremism and take up leadership positions in their communities. She underlined the Mourchidate network as a successful example that has been recognized in regional events and workshops, noting that the network could be replicated in other countries in the region.

6. Member States welcomed the briefings and raised the following points:

- They noted with concern the insecurity in the Sahel and its spillover effects. They condemned terrorist attacks and violence in the region and the impact on women and youth in particular. They stressed the need for increased efforts to address illicit financial flows, transnational organized crime, violent extremism, and terrorism to achieve peace and sustainable development in the region.
- They recognized that current strategies and initiatives in the Sahel require further operationalization and implementation to achieve greater effectiveness, and as such called for more adaptable approaches that tackle root causes.
- They advocated for a multi-dimensional, integrated, comprehensive, holistic, context-based, locally owned approaches to peacebuilding. In this regard, they further underlined the importance of nationally owned and country-specific initiatives that are inclusive of civil society.
- They welcomed bilateral and multilateral cooperation to further regional and subregional initiatives, for instance with UNOWAS, ECOWAS, UNODC, UNDP, UNOCT and the African Union.
- They underlined the instrumental role of women in peacebuilding and sustainable development and in combatting transnational organized crime, violent extremism, and terrorism. They called for women's full, equal, and meaningful participation.
- They noted the potential of youth as positive change agents in the region and called for greater economic opportunities and education for youth to hamper further recruitment into violent extremist groups and transitional criminal organizations.
- They called for predictable and consistent financing for peacebuilding in the Sahel. They called for support to UN efforts in the region as well as increased contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

7. In her concluding remarks, **Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, the Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding Support**, reiterated the need for multidimensional peacebuilding approaches,

in addition to security approaches, to address root causes to the transborder instability and insecurity in the Sahel. She informed that the Sahel is high priority for the PBF, with 35 per cent of its funds allocated to the region in 2022. She underlined that the Fund is a critical tool for cross-border and regional cooperation to address the most prominent fragility drivers and prevent conflict, including preventing violent extremism and transnational organized crime and fostering climate security approaches. She highlighted several cross-border initiatives that are addressing the causes of instability in borderland communities, such as weak border management practices fueling mistrust between border authorities and communities; rising transnational organized crimes such as smuggling of migrants, arms, timber, drugs and human trafficking; and the illegal exploitation of natural resources that leads to environmental degradation. Further, she emphasized the importance of partnerships in prevention and addressing the root causes of fragility, noting that the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) has built strategic partnerships with international financial institutions to ensure greater coherence and alignment of efforts, including through shared data, analysis, and assessments. Lastly, she highlighted civil society organizations as crucial partners, particularly in light of their instrumental understanding of local context, to ensure tailored peacebuilding efforts.

Chair's recommendations

- Continue to utilize the Commission as a platform to facilitate exchanges, best practices, and lessons learned on peacebuilding efforts to address the root causes of insecurity and instability in the Sahel.
- Continue advocating for inclusive, participatory, localized and community-based approaches and initiatives to advance peacebuilding efforts in the context of transnational organized crime, conflict and terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel.
- Encourage the international community to provide political accompaniment and financial and technical support to the Sahel region in support of peacebuilding, sustaining peace, and sustainable and inclusive development.