

## **The Peacebuilding Commission Annual Session**

### **“Regional approaches to peacebuilding: The Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and the Mano River Union”**

**4 December 2019**

#### **Chair’s summary**

#### **Opening Segment**

1. On 4 July 2019, the Peacebuilding Commission convened its ambassadorial-level annual session under the theme: “*Regional approaches to peacebuilding: The Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and the Mano River Union*”. The meeting, chaired by H.E. Mr. Guillermo Fernández de Soto, the Chair of the Commission, was convened to exchange views on the challenges and opportunities for enhancing regional and sub-regional approaches to address the multi-faceted challenges in the region.
2. In his introductory remarks, the Chair thanked the briefers in advance for their interest in engaging with the Peacebuilding Commission and noted that the meeting provided an opportunity to deliberate on the political, security, social, economic, developmental and environmental challenges facing the countries in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and the Mano River Union. The Chair briefed on the Commission’s engagement in these regions, including the visit to the Mano River Union (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire), which occurred from 4 to 8 November 2019, during which the delegation met with government representatives, regional organizations, women and youth organizations and International Financial Institutions. The Chair recalled that the Peacebuilding Commission provided a unique platform to enhance coherence in international support, not least on cross-border challenges, and reiterated that the objective of the annual session was to provide a new impetus to ongoing efforts in support of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in these regions, including the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.
3. The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), H.E. Ms. Mona Juul, highlighted the importance of further strengthening the cooperation between ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission. The President recalled the joint meeting held between ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission on 3 December 2019 on the “*Impact of Cross-border Transhumance on Sustainable peace and Development in West Africa and the Sahel*”, which had resulted in many concrete recommendations. The President stressed that peace and sustainable development were intrinsically interlinked and that all efforts for peacebuilding and sustainable development were likely to fail if the silos could not be broken. She further underlined the need for an inclusive approach that addressed the rights and needs of women and girls as well as the socioeconomic and environmental root causes of conflict. In conclusion, she noted that the 2020 review of the peacebuilding architecture would be an opportunity for

stock-taking and to further invigorate the cooperation between ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission.

4. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, noted the alarming security situation in the Liptako Gourma area<sup>1</sup> with spillover effects on Niger and Burkina Faso rising to devastating proportions. He informed the Commission that the number of internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso had increased from approximately 30,000 at the beginning of the year to currently 500,000. The SRSG recalled that the ninth steering committee meeting of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel was held in Dakar on 21 October 2019, where it had been agreed to establish a matrix to clarify roles and responsibilities as well as to better communicate efforts made and impact achieved by developing a strategy for communication and advocacy. The steering committee had also made plans for coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the ECOWAS Sahel Action Plan that was underway. The SRSG recalled several joint missions with the SRSG for the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to areas affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. The most recent joint mission was to Nigeria on 19-22 November, which had also advanced the cooperation with the European Union as their Special Representative for the Sahel, Mr. Angel Losada, had joined the mission. Furthermore, he noted UNOWAS' support to the second Lake Chad Basin Governor's Forum held on 17-18 July 2019 in Niger and stressed the value of a strategic bottom-up approach within this framework. The SRSG reiterated that the Peacebuilding Commission's visit to the Mano River Union in November 2019 had been a timely opportunity to show solidarity with the countries.
5. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa, Mr. François Louncény Fall, underlined the regional nature of the crisis that called for a regional response while being sensitive to context-specific differences. He underscored the importance of the close cooperation between UNOCA and UNOWAS as well as cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations, including the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), to further advance the regional approach of the UN. He reiterated that Boko Haram continued to be a persistent threat to peace, stability and socio-economic development in the region and stressed the need for an integrated approach by strengthening social cohesion, promoting socio-economic development and addressing climate change. He urged the Commission to support the implementation of the Regional Stabilization Strategy for stabilization, recovery and resilience, adopted by the Lake Chad Basin Commission, Member States, and endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Council, to prioritize addressing cross-border challenges. In this regard, he highlighted the cross-border projects in the Lake Chad Basin region funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, in particular between Cameroon and

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<sup>1</sup> Liptako-Gourma area spanning across the border between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger ("Peace Beyond Borders": UNPBF.org).

Chad, that responded to the need for projects that could be implemented simultaneously in the affected countries.

6. The Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), H.E. Mr. Mamman Nuhu, informed the Peacebuilding Commission that the main drivers of conflict in the Lake Chad Basin were the drastic shrinkage of Lake Chad, the demographic pressure of high population growth and the competition over dwindling natural resources. The Executive Secretary updated on the progress of the Regional Stabilization Strategy and on the launch of the Regional Stabilization Facility that, with support from UNDP, aimed to meet some of the immediate stabilization needs of the region by helping local authorities extend effective civilian security and improve the delivery of basic services. He informed the Commission that the indicative budget for the implementation of the strategy amounted to USD\$12 billion and appealed to PBC Member States to consider establishing a multi-donor trust fund to this strategy.

#### **Interactive Dialogue: The Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin**

7. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso, H.E. Ms. Mariame Fofana, briefed on the efforts of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5) to address the immediate needs of the population, including the G5 Priority Investment Plan, which consists of 40 projects targeting cross border areas, security, governance, resilience and infrastructure. The Senior Adviser at the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union, Mr. Mohammed Bagobiri, stressed the need to prioritize political, economic and social issues through a multi-sectoral approach based on the comparative advantages of stakeholders. He underlined the crucial role of regional and sub-regional organizations in addressing regional threats. Professor Ali Mahamane, the Rector of the University of Diffa in Niger, briefed on the adverse impact of climate change in the Lake Chad Basin, which had led to 23,000 people being affected by floods in the Diffa region. Furthermore, the attacks by Boko Haram in the region had resulted in a massive displacement of 500,000 civilians and the closure of over 1,000 schools in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Interactive Dialogue: The Mano River Union**

8. In his opening remarks, the Chair recalled the recent visit of the Peacebuilding Commission to the Mano River Union (MRU) countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, which allowed participants to learn firsthand about the peacebuilding challenges on the ground and visit the Peacebuilding Fund projects. He highlighted that the Commission is a symbol of hope in the region in terms of practical and pragmatic action. He underscored the major efforts by

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF report entitled "School Closures In West And Central Africa Triple Since 2017, As Education Comes Under Fire Across The Region" dated 23 August 2019, points out that in the four countries affected by crisis in the Lake Chad Basin – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – stayed at roughly the same high level, varying from 981 to 1,054, between the end of 2017 and June 2019.

civil society and governments in the region to strengthen and build institutions, and highlighted projects where women mediators are championing dispute resolution in their communities.

9. Ms. Yeiwah Kaindaneh of Purposeful, an NGO working to empower adolescent girls, recalled Sierra Leone's past crises and informed of entrenched practices of discrimination and oppression experienced by women and girls. She described Purposeful's efforts to combat discriminatory practices by amplifying girls' voices, providing financial resources, building solidarity between and across girls' movements, and supporting innovation in grassroots programming with and for girls. She underscored the need to support both individual and collective change to help girls realize their full potential and called for more direct funding to grassroots efforts.
10. Mr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah, Chief Advisor for Peace, Security and Governance at the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union, noted the cultural, historical and socio-economic ties of the four MRU countries and underscored the interconnectedness between the states whereby insecurity in one of them has a direct impact on the stability of others. He informed that managing diversity during and after electoral processes is the first major peacebuilding hurdle for the MRU countries. Mr. Bah informed that the second challenge was that the growing youth population – without matching educational and employment opportunities – are forced to engage in violence for survival. This challenge is further compounded by porous borders which facilitate activities of criminal networks and ex-combatants. To reengage the youth population, he recommended that Governments revive agricultural production and marketing and create an enabling environment for private-sector development geared to employing young people. Additionally, to promote regional security and cooperation he recommended the MRU leverage the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), and the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. He highlighted that stalled or incomplete reconciliation processes in some countries in the sub-region was also a challenge and called upon governments to reprioritize national programs for reconciliation and establish national transitional justice programs. Lastly, Mr. Bah stressed that the MRU Secretariat must be empowered to foster effective coordination amongst member states as well as between member states and other actors.

### **The remarks by Member States**

11. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- Several Member States called for renewed urgency and for swifter and concrete action to address the multidimensional and cross-border threats in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. They also stressed the importance of better coordination on stabilization, human rights and countering violent extremism.

- Member States expressed solidarity with the populations in Burkina Faso and Mali given the terrorist attacks, and called for the international community to “come together in support of these countries.
- They emphasized the use of South-South cooperation to support regional and sub-regional peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts.
- The inclusion of gender equality in decision making mechanisms at the local and national levels was seen as vital for peacebuilding. Member States also recognized the huge potential of youth (65% of the population in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin is under 25 years of age) for the region’s stability and development.
- In view of the unique platform of the Peacebuilding Commission as a bridging mechanism for peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian pillars of the United Nations, they welcomed continuous engagement in support of the Sahel, in coordination with relevant regional organisations as well civil society representatives, including through dedicated briefings on the status of implementation of United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.
- Member States welcomed the regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the affected Boko Haram areas of the Lake Chad Basin region and echoed the call by the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission for a whole of United Nations system support for the strategy.
- They welcomed the timeliness of the recent Peacebuilding Commission’s trip to the MRU countries, referencing the trip as a genuine demonstration of partnership between the UN and stakeholders to find lasting solutions to challenges in the region. They stressed the need for International Financial Institutions to align programs with regional priorities and steer investments with a peacebuilding lens. They highlighted the need for sustainable financing to secure peacebuilding gains in the sub-region and in that regard they highlighted the importance of partnerships with the African Development Bank (AfDB), World Bank, and the IMF. They also reiterated the call to support the Peacebuilding Fund.
- They acknowledged Sierra Leone’s announcement of the establishment of an MRU United Nations group that would engage the UN in New York on issues of common interest and provide greater visibility. Recognizing the emerging potential of the sub-region, they echoed Mr. Bah’s recommendation to support and empower the MRU Secretariat to foster effective coordination.
- Member States welcomed the continuous engagement of the Commission in support of UNOWAS and UNOCA mandates. In that regard, they mentioned as a good example the recent briefing by the Commission Chair to a Security Council Informal Interactive Dialogue meeting prior to the Security Council deliberations on the renewal of the UNOWAS mandate.