



Joint Meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

The Situation in the Sahel

Wednesday, 28 June 2017

Informal Summary

The President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Mr. Frederick Makamure Shava, and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), H.E. Mr. Cho Tae-yul, co-chaired a joint meeting on “The Situation in the Sahel”, with active participation of Member States from both bodies, and from the African region, including the Group of Five for the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger).

The meeting came as a response to the desire of Member States to bridge between peace and development challenges and promote an integrated approach to crises, building on the 2016 Joint Meeting on the 2030 Agenda and Sustaining Peace. In this context, the meeting sought to deliberate on the multi-dimensional challenges and address the root causes and drivers of conflict that pertain to the social, economic and environmental factors in the Sahel region. Against the backdrop of recent discussions on the Sahel in the Security Council and in the PBC, this meeting would contribute to deeper commitment and partnerships between the UN system, the countries of the Sahel and other international and regional partners with the view to advancing the implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), and in adapting the strategy to the evolving needs of the region. Enhanced dialogue between ECOSOC and the PBC would strengthen coherence and complementarity between the United Nations peace and security efforts and its development, human rights and humanitarian work.

The Deputy Secretary-General delivered a [keynote address](#) at the opening of the meeting, calling for regional and international corporation at all levels, across all issues, and urging all to support consistent efforts to reassert State authority and avoid a disproportionate emphasis on security. She further stressed that consistent medium- and long-term efforts were required to reverse the pattern of growing marginalization of the poor, rural societies frustrated by a lack of access to basic social services including water, electricity, healthcare and education and access to justice and livelihoods.

United Nations’ response to the Sahel

Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) provided an overview and recent development in the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy on the

Sahel (UNISS). UNISS presented a multidimensional approach to fight challenges of governance, security, resilience and development. Its strategic goals included enhancing inclusive and effective governance throughout the region; strengthening national and regional security mechanisms to be capable of dealing with cross border threats; and humanitarian and development plans and interventions to build long term resilience.

Mr. Chambas underscored that the complexity of the Sahel required a flexible response, as the region displayed different conditions of governance, security and resilience. The UNISS Steering Committee, which brought together UN Regional Directors and Resident Coordinators, adopted “Elements of an Action Plan on the UNISS” on 23 June, to be further discussed at the level of the UN Executive Committee. The Action Plan proposed to transform the Steering Committee into a consultative platform emphasizing cross-sectoral as well as regional information exchange within UN actors and focusing discussions on the overall UNISS objectives. It aimed at a clear division of labour of UN actors to separate the coordination and advocacy functions from the implementation of the UNISS programmatic recommendations. It also emphasized that the UN should strengthen cooperation with and support all regional entities working in the Sahel, including the G-5 Sahel, ECOWAS, AU, LCBC, MRU, CILLS, the Liptako-Gourma Authority and ECCAS. Furthermore, Mr. Chambas underscored the need for more support, including in the form of funding, to foster the implementation of the UNISS and its objectives.

Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Assistant Administrator and Director, Regional Bureau for Africa of UNDP, elaborated on the UN system’s work on the ground in the Sahel, the challenges faced by the region and possible solutions. Emphasizing that close to 17 bilateral or multilateral strategies or initiatives on the Sahel existed, Mr. Mar Dieye proposed a road map that included a structural response, coordination among the various strategies on the Sahel and optimal management of large areas. He underscored that structuring private investments with adequate funding with the active participation of communities, especially border communities were imperative. Furthermore, UNISS could serve as a framework for concerted dialogue on all initiatives on the region, including the Bamako Ministerial Platform, the Permanent Secretariat of the G-5 Sahel, the Liptako-Gourma Authority and the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

Addressing the Root Causes of Fragility in the Sahel Region

Several speakers echoed the Deputy Secretary-General and underscored the need to avoid a focus on security aspect of the response alone and urged development partners, including the UN, to act beyond immediate humanitarian responses and look into the root causes of vulnerability, in particular the lack of economic opportunities and decent jobs, especially for youth, poverty, severe food insecurity, and harsh climate change. Other speakers also highlighted the deficits in resilience, governance and investment. Sustainable development and good governance were considered key to addressing root causes. Structural investments should target basic social services that were lacking in most areas in the Sahel, empowering women and young people for education and employment, and livelihood, while addressing economics development and border management issues. Investment by the private sector was considered necessary and investments in remote and border areas were encouraged.

Women and young people, as well as civil society organizations, needed to play an active role in political dialogue and reconciliation in the Sahel.

Insecurity that stem from trafficking of arms, people, and drugs, migration issues, border conflicts, and extremist groups should not be overlooked. Member States recognized that minimum security needed to be established to make progress on sustainable development. There was concern that terrorism and extremist ideology were growing in size threatening countries beyond the Sahel region, devastating the most vulnerable population. A comprehensive, regional mechanism strengthening national and regional securities was needed in response to cross border challenges. The creation of a regional force by the G-5 Sahel to improve security, which was recently endorsed by the Security Council, was commended by Member States.

A Regional Approach

The interlinkages between peace, security, and development and the drivers of fragility required operational structural responses. Short-term efforts should be linked to a future vision, and resources must be allocated more strategically to maximize the effect of commitment and achieve sustainable development in the Sahel. A regional tailored approach and more flexible solutions taking into account local conditions should be deployed to sustain peace in the region. In this context, the strategic goals of UNISS were considered to be complementary to each other, and were expected to give an integrated response to address the root cause of the multi-faceted problem in Sahel. Furthermore, national initiatives by local governments, the Group of Five for the Sahel, the African Union (AU), and regional coordination platforms needed to be encouraged and supported.

Enhanced cooperation and coordination

Tackling the vicious challenges in Sahel and achieving the 2030 Goals required operational structural responses and efforts among local, national, and international stockholders. Delegations consistently called for stronger partnership and better coordination among all agencies and partners in implementing the multiplicity of existing strategies for the Sahel for more efficient use of resources. The United Nations needed to cooperate with and support regional entities, and strong partnership between United Nations entities, donor countries, and Sahel countries was critical to ensure consistent and coherent effort on the ground. Meanwhile, some delegations questioned the fragmentation of the United Nations and competition among UN entities, and concerned that without effective coordination, the partial, short-term, and limited territory coverage nature of individual programmes would generate high transaction costs and lead to limited aggregate impact.

The need to better coordinate the existing strategies and plans in the Sahel region at a higher level, in accordance with the priorities of the countries, was underlined by many. In this regard, the coordination mandate of ECOSOC and the advisory role of the PBC were highlighted. The important cooperation between ECOSOC and PBC was recognized and dialogue on cross cutting issues were encouraged to strengthen efforts on building governance, security, and resilience, and to ensure coherence and complementarity. Breaking down institutional silos was considered essential for meeting the needs of the countries affected by conflict, strengthened engagement and more joint meetings were encouraged.

The Chair of the PBC expressed the Commission's strong commitment to use its convening power to sustain international attention to the challenges in the Sahel. The President of ECOSOC proposed to look at lessons learned from the experience of the Sahel to see how ECOSOC could give further guidance to the UN development system to enhance their contribution to peacebuilding and sustaining peace at country level. The President also suggested that the Development Cooperation Forum could be a space for looking at ways to improve coordination between the UN and other development partners working in the Sahel region. Continuing engagement of the two bodies could provide a platform for regular "reality-checks" on the UN's effectiveness in this vital part of the African region.

Recommendations

- Prioritization of efforts, in particular to address cross-border challenges facing the Sahel region to foster stability, build resilience of communities and enhance economic opportunities, was considered critical. These needed to be better coordinated at a higher level.
- Given the existence of numerous strategies in the Sahel, the focus should be on provision of adequate resources for existing programmes and frameworks, and bridging strategies to enhance their impact on the ground, including through cross-border programmes.
- Local communities, especially border communities, must be engaged to strengthen social cohesion and impact.
- The Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission should continue their engagement on the Sahel region to promote sustainable development and sustaining peace. The Economic and Social Council should use its coordination and oversight role of the United Nations development system to promote a coordinated and coherent approach in the UN's response. The Peacebuilding Commission should continue to enhance its engagement with UNOWAS, regional institutions, and all countries in the Sahel area in its peacebuilding work.