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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
314TH MEETING AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL
BAMAKO, MALI
20 MARCH 2012

PSC/MIN/DECL.(CCCIV)

DECLARATION ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION

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1. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), at its 314th meeting held in Bamako, Mali, on 20 March 2012, considered the situation in the Sahel region on the basis of the report of the Chairperson of the Commission [PSC/MIN/3(CCCXIV)], the statements made by the representatives of the countries of the region and other African countries, as well as by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations, the European Union (EU), the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Canada and other AU bilateral and multilateral partners.
2. Council also its various communiqués regarding the threat facing the Sahel region, and welcomed the increasing realization within the international community of the gravity of the situation and the need for an urgent and coordinated action to address it, as demonstrated by the adoption by the UN Security Council, since September 2011, of several resolutions addressing, among others, the problem of the proliferation of weapons into the Sahel region, including Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS).
3. Council further recalled paragraph 14 of decision Assembly/AU/Dec.408(XVIII), as well as the relevant paragraphs of the communiqué of the 40th meeting of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of States and Government, held in Abuja from 16 to 17 February 2012. Council further recalled the press releases on the situation in the northern part of Mali, issued by the Chairperson of the Commission on 18 January and 12 March 2012.
4. Council expressed deep concern at the prevailing situation on the ground, noting that the Sahel region is faced with multiple challenges, linked to terrorism and transnational organized crime, proliferation of weapons, illicit trafficking and latent armed conflicts, as well as environmental degradation and climate change, food insecurity and nutritional crisis. Council noted that these challenges were compounded by the Libyan crisis, in particular the influx of hundreds of thousands of returnees, as well as the inflow of arms and ammunition from the Libyan arsenal, which provide a source of armament to terrorist and criminal groups in the region. Council further noted that the attacks launched by armed rebels in the northern part of Mali, since mid-January 2012, have aggravated an already precarious security situation, created a humanitarian crisis, including the displacement of populations within Mali and to neighboring countries, and undermined development efforts.
5. Council commended the Commission and the UN Secretariat for the Joint Multidisciplinary Mission to the Sahel, undertaken from 7 to 23 December 2011, to assess the impact of the Libyan crisis on the countries of the region. Council further commended the Commission for the initiative to organize a ministerial-level consultation among the countries of the region and other stakeholders, in Addis Ababa, on 29 January 2012, which considered the report and recommendations of the joint AU-UN Mission.
6. Council noted with satisfaction that, over the past few years, the countries of the region have made sustained efforts, both individually and collectively, to address the challenges facing them. In this respect, Council commended the core countries of Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger and the other existing bilateral cooperative arrangements among the core countries and in the rest of the region; ECOWAS for its continued efforts towards the promotion of peace, security and stability in the West Africa region; as well as the Libyan Government for the convening of a regional ministerial conference on border security, in Tripoli, from 11 to 12 March 2012, which made important recommendations. Council also recognized the contribution inherent in the mandates of other relevant regional organizations, namely the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and the North Africa Regional Capability (NARC).
7. Council underlined the need for a comprehensive approach dealing with all the issues at stake, particularly terrorism, armed rebellions, transnational organized crime, illicit proliferation of arms, food insecurity, poverty, youth unemployment, environmental degradation and climate change, governance

challenges and chronic under-development, as well as renewed, enhanced and better-coordinated efforts to assist the concerned countries in implementing their nationally- and regionally-developed strategies. Regarding more specifically the situation in the northern part of Mali, Council underlined the unacceptability of armed rebellions in a democratic country where political demands can be pursued peacefully. Council pledged Africa's unflinching commitment to the sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Mali.

8. Council stressed that the payment of ransom for the release of hostages has become a major source of financing which enables terrorist groups to buy support from local populations, acquire the necessary logistics and infrastructure and recruit new elements, in addition to criminalizing local economies. Accordingly, Council reiterated the need to effectively prohibit the payment of ransom to terrorist groups, in conformity with decision Assembly/AU/Dec.256 (XIII) of the Assembly of the Union, and urged the partners to extend full support to this end.

9. Council endorsed the conclusions of the joint AU-UN experts meeting held in Addis Ababa, on 14 and 15 March 2012. Council requested the Commission, working closely with the UN, as part of the partnership between the two organisations, and in consultation with other stakeholders, including the relevant Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and relevant partners, to take all the steps required for the follow-up and implementation of those conclusions in the different identified areas of action, i.e. security and diplomatic aspects, humanitarian assistance, food security and reinsertion of migrant workers, long-term development, and follow-up.

10. Council requested all Member States to lend their support to the implementation of this Declaration and the conclusions of the joint AU-UN experts meeting, including by contributing resources. In this respect, Council highlighted the plight of the populations affected by the current food and nutritional crisis, and the imperative for African solidarity.

11. Council paid tribute to the neighboring countries of Mali hosting Malian refugees fleeing fighting in the northern part of the country. Council commended them for the humanitarian support being provided.

12. Council commended the UN agencies for their continued work in the areas of humanitarian assistance, governance and development. Council equally welcomed the support provided by the EU and its Member States within the framework of its Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, adopted on 21 March 2011. Council also noted the support provided by a number of bilateral partners, in particular the US, including efforts to mitigate the threat of the MANPADS and other capacity-building initiatives, as well as actions undertaken by the Sahel Working Group of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF). Council urged them to extend political support and provide material assistance for the implementation of the conclusions of the experts meeting, as well as to make further contributions towards the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel.

13. Council requested the Commission to take all necessary steps to follow up on the conclusions of the experts meeting and the present Declaration. In this respect, Council requested the Commission to enhance its presence on the ground through the existing AU offices in the region and to take all other steps required to enhance their effectiveness in support of the efforts and initiative of the countries of the region. Council further requested the Commission to organize, whenever required, ministerial-level consultations among the countries of the region and other stakeholders, in particular on the margins of the ordinary sessions of the AU Executive Council.

14. Council requested the Chairperson of the Commission to forward this Declaration and the conclusions of the experts meeting to the United Nations Security Council and to all other relevant international bilateral and multilateral partners for their information and support as appropriate.

15. Council agreed to regularly review the situation in the Sahel on the basis of quarterly reports to be submitted by the Commission.