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REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION



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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its decision Assembly/AU/Dec.408(XVIII) on the Report of the Peace and Security Council on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa, the 18th ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Addis Ababa, on 29 and 30 January 2012, requested Council to consider, with the participation of the countries of the region, the impact of the Libyan crisis on these countries and the means by which the AU could enhance the efforts of the region and mobilise adequate assistance from the international community to support the priorities identified by the affected countries.

2. The present report is submitted to the meeting of Council to facilitate its deliberations on the situation in the Sahel region. The report gives a succinct account of the initiatives taken regarding the challenges faced by the region. It contains observations and recommendations on actions that the AU can take to support the efforts deployed by the countries of the region, individually and collectively. It concludes with an annex on the conclusions of the meeting of experts on the situation in the Sahel region convened by the AU and the United Nations, in Addis Ababa, on 14 and 15 March 2012.

II. JOINT AFRICAN UNION-UNITED NATIONS MULTIDISCIPLINARY MISSION TO THE SAHEL

3. As part of their partnership and follow-up of the relevant decisions and resolutions of Council and the UN Security Council, a joint AU-UN multi-disciplinary mission was undertaken to the Sahel region, from 7 to 23 December 2011. The objective of the mission was to assess the impact of the Libyan crisis on the countries of the region and the national and regional capacities to mitigate this impact, with a view to submitting recommendations on the best way forward. The mission visited Bamako, from 8 to 11 December; Niamey, from 12 to 14 December; N'Djamena, from 15 to 17 December; Nouakchott, from 18 to 19 December; Abuja, on 20 December; and Dakar, from 21 to 22 December 2011.

4. The mission noted that, as a result of the crisis, the countries of the region, especially those in the Sahel, had to contend with the influx of hundreds of thousands of traumatized and impoverished returnees, as well as the inflow of unspecified and unquantifiable number of arms and ammunition from the Libyan arsenal, providing a source of armament to terrorist and criminal groups in the region. Although the volume and the impact of the returnee population vary from one country to another, the influx clearly has the potential to further exacerbate an already precarious and tenuous situation. In addition, these countries are directly threatened



by an impending food security and nutrition crisis that can further exacerbate and negatively affect the political, social and economic situation in the region.

5. The mission concluded that immediate and long-term action should be taken to mitigate the impact of the Libyan crisis, which adequately takes into account the root causes of the problems in the region. At the national level, this includes supporting capacity-building for ongoing initiatives by Governments, as well as supporting efforts of the UN Country Teams (UNCT) and other development initiatives, especially in building better coherence for the implementation of security, humanitarian and development programmes. At the regional level, action should aim at ensuring that support is given to the strengthening of existing regional mechanisms, through a process of capacity-building and enhanced coordination arrangements. This includes border management and information sharing on cross-border activities. At the international level, there is need for the mobilization of greater support for the Sahel region to address the challenges of human insecurity and underdevelopment.

6. On 26 January 2012, and following its consideration of the report of the assessment mission, the UN Security Council expressed serious concern about the increasing violence perpetrated by armed groups, exacerbated by the spread of weapons from within and outside the Sahel region. In particular, the Security Council welcomed the collaborative efforts of the UN and the AU, and underlined the urgent need for a coordinated and inclusive approach by all main stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive solution to the problems of the region.

7. On 29 January 2012, a meeting at ministerial level was convened at the initiative of the Commission, in Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 18th ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union, to consider the report of the assessment mission. The meeting stressed the need to develop and implement a comprehensive approach dealing with all the issues at stake, particularly terrorism, armed rebellions, organized transnational crime, food insecurity, youth unemployment and poverty, environment and development challenges. The meeting further stressed the importance of close coordination and cooperation. It was agreed that effectively addressing these challenges would require that the international community provide timely and adequate support for the efforts of the countries of the region, including the structures that have been established and the policies developed.

8. In its above-mentioned decision Assembly/AU/Dec. 408(XVIII), the 18th ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union, *inter alia*, reiterated AU's deep concern about the proliferation of weapons in the Sahelo-Saharan region and the risks this situation posed for long-term security and stability in that area; strongly condemned the activities of armed groups in the region, including the attacks perpetrated in the northern part of Mali; and expressed its full support for the efforts being made by the countries of the region.

III. SUBSEQUENT INITIATIVES



9. The 40th ordinary session of the Authority of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja, on 16 and 17 February 2012, and in which I participated, expressed its deep concern about the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, particularly in Mali and Niger. The Authority strongly condemned the rebellion of the Mouvement national pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) in Mali, and expressed its unreserved support for the efforts made by Mali to defend its territorial integrity. Making an appeal for an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities by the rebels and for the restitution of all the areas occupied in the country, the Heads of State and Government invited all the stakeholders to engage in an inclusive dialogue with a view to determining the peaceful ways and means to resolve the crisis.

10. On 21 February 2012, the UN Security Council, at the initiative of Togo, which was then chairing the Council, organised a high-level debate chaired by President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé on the impact of transnational organised crime in West Africa and in the Sahel Region. The Commission was represented by my Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), based in Algiers. In the presidential statement adopted on that occasion, the Security Council expressed satisfaction at the ongoing regional initiatives and encouraged sustainable international capacity building to fight against arms and drug trafficking, terrorism and piracy in the region.

11. From 16 to 29 February 2012, I dispatched my Special Representative in Côte d'Ivoire, as emissary to Mali, Mauritania and Niger, within the framework of a mission to seek information on the situation obtaining in the northern part of Mali and in the Sahel region, in general. The objective was to gather the views of the authorities concerned on the initiatives that the AU could take to contribute to the restoration of normalcy. In the three countries, my emissary was able to hold talks with the highest authorities, including Presidents Amadou Toumani Touré, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and Mahamadou Issoufou. On his return to Abidjan, my emissary was received in audience, on 1 March 2012, by President Alassane Dramane Ouattara, Current Chairman of ECOWAS, for an exchange of information on the situation and the ways and means for a strengthened coordination between the AU and ECOWAS. Furthermore, my Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation held similar consultations with the Algerian authorities.

12. On 11 and 12 March 2012, at the initiative of the Libyan Government, a Regional Ministerial Conference on Border Security was held in Tripoli. The objective was to strengthen the links and the operational cooperation between Libya and its neighbours to take up the serious challenges of border security faced by the region. I participated in that Conference, leading a delegation comprising my Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and the Head of the AU Liaison Office in Tripoli. It should be recalled that the announcement of



that Conference was made by the Libyan Prime Minister at the 18th ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union.

13. The Conference, which was preceded by a meeting of experts, adopted a Plan of Action. The latter focuses on the following three points: common understanding of the security challenges of the moment; enhancement of bilateral and regional cooperation, including the exchange of intelligence information, border security and management and illegal migration, fight against terrorism, reduction in proliferation of arms and a Follow up mechanism. The conclusions of the Tripoli Conference constitute a useful contribution to the efforts aimed at facing different threats to the region and which may, as such, be taken into account in the deliberations of Council.

IV. AFRICAN UNION-UNITED NATIONS EXPERTS' MEETING ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL

14. As a follow-up to the conclusions of the ministerial level consultation of 29 January 2012, the Commission and the UN Secretariat jointly convened an experts meeting on the situation in the Sahel region, in Addis Ababa, from 14 to 15 March 2011. The meeting was attended by the countries of the region and other concerned/interested African countries, as well as by relevant Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs), other regional organizations and entities. Participants also included relevant UN agencies and other multilateral and bilateral partners. The objectives of the meeting were, notably, to take stock of ongoing efforts and initiatives to address the challenges facing the region; review the recommendations of the joint assessment mission and agree on how best to support the ongoing efforts by the region; identify priority action areas; and agree on modalities for enhanced coordination among all stakeholders and effective follow-up of the recommendations that would emerge from the meeting.

15. The participants underlined the need for renewed, enhanced and better-coordinated efforts to assist the countries concerned to successfully address the challenges at hand, on the basis of their national and regional strategies. They welcomed the recommendations of the AU-UN joint assessment mission, which provide a good basis for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the challenges in the Sahel region. More specifically, they made a set of recommendations covering, notably, security and diplomatic aspects; food security, humanitarian assistance and socio-economic issues, including the reintegration of migrant workers; long-term development; and follow-up. The conclusions of the meeting are attached hereto for consideration by Council.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

16. As stressed above, the Sahel region faces many challenges related to terrorism, transnational organised crimes, the prevalence of latent conflicts, the presence of armed



groups, drought, environmental degradation, underdevelopment and problems of governance. The crisis faced by Libya last year has further fragilised the region because of the inflow of arms and fighters that it caused, as well as the return of tens of thousands of migrant workers to their countries of origin without any real prospect of socio-economic reintegration.

17. The attacks launched by the armed rebels in the North of Mali since mid-January constitute a serious additional complicating factor. These attacks have not only provoked a humanitarian crisis marked by significant displacement of civilian population inside Mali and towards neighbouring countries, but they have also compromised stabilisation and socio-economic development efforts made in the affected areas. I had the opportunity, in two communiqués issued on 18 January and 12 March 2012, to pronounce myself on this situation and mark the solidarity of the AU with the Government and people of Mali and the commitment of our continental Organisation to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Mali.

18. Building on the decisions adopted by the Assembly in January 2012 and by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in February 2012, it is important, that Council affirms its rejection of the recourse to armed rebellion in a country whose democratic institutions offer a framework for the expression of all legitimate claims and make it possible to peacefully pursue the attainment of political objectives. Similarly, Council may wish to reiterate the commitment of the AU to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Mali. Any attempt to call into question this fundamental AU principle must be discouraged and, if need be, fought against vigorously, as it is true that it will pose a serious threat to the region and the entire continent. In this respect, Council must appeal to all the partners, whether it is the United Nations or other bilateral or multilateral partners, to fully support the position of Africa on this matter. The unity of the international community around the principled position of Africa on this crucial issue is necessary for a peaceful and fair solution.

19. In parallel, the AU should leave no stone unturned to promote a political solution to the present crisis. The countries of the region, particularly Algeria, which, for very long, has made efforts to facilitate negotiations between the Malian parties, have, from this point of view, a crucial role to play. It behoves upon Council, on the basis of its deliberations, to determine how best to conceive the facilitation and mediation efforts, in the search for a solution fully consistent with the AU principles, and articulate their relation with the action by the AU to mobilise the required African and international support needed for the successful conclusion of such an endeavour. Council may wish, in this respect, to draw up the appropriate formulae for the conduct of the efforts aimed at achieving a cessation of hostilities and triggering a momentum towards a political solution, as well as producing synergies in support of this objective.



20. More generally, the present challenges in the Sahel region require increased mobilisation and the active involvement of the continent, in support of the efforts of the countries of the region and the priorities they have set. The conclusions of the meeting of experts held in Addis Ababa indicate clearly the way forward in the different spheres of action identified, in the immediate, short and medium terms. Council may wish to endorse these conclusions and lend its support to the efforts by the Commission to work towards their implementation, in collaboration with the UN. With regard to an issue of such fundamental importance for the security and wellbeing of our continent and its peoples, it is crucial for Africa, through the AU and its organs and appropriate regional structures, to play a leading role in the search for a lasting solution. It is clearly understood that we should work closely with our international partners, particularly the United Nations and other multilateral and bilateral actors concerned. Echoing the pronouncement by Council, I am pleased to note the growing awareness of the international community about the seriousness and complex nature of the challenges faced by the countries of the Sahel region.

21. Equally crucial is the need for optimal mobilisation of our continent to support the victims of drought in the Sahel and the people affected by the fighting in the Northern part of Mali. I express the gratitude of the AU to ECOWAS for its contribution to these efforts, as well as to Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, for hosting Malian refugees and for the assistance given to them. I thank our bilateral and multilateral partners for the humanitarian support they provide and encourage them to pursue and intensify their assistance.

22. I would like to seize this opportunity to reiterate the appreciation of the AU to the countries of the region for their sustained efforts in addressing the different aspects of the problems faced by the Sahel region. I pay tribute to the core countries (Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) for their sustained efforts and commitment to fight terrorism in a spirit of solidarity. I would also like to express the appreciation of the AU to ECOWAS for its continued commitment to the cause of peace, security and stability in West Africa, and to Libya for having taken the initiative to convene the Ministerial Conference in Tripoli. I also recognise the contribution inherent in the activities of other regional organisations concerned, namely the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and the North Africa Regional Capability (NARC).

23. The AU Commission will spare no effort to support all these initiatives, including a strengthened presence in the region, through the AU Offices on the ground, and any other appropriate means of action. The outcome of the deliberations of Council will be the basis of the measures to be taken to ensure a closer coordination with the countries of the region so that their concerns are better relayed and their efforts better supported both by the AU and the rest of the international community.

