

Extraordinary Session of the Authority of the Heads of State and Government
of ECOWAS on Antiterrorism, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 14 September 2019

Speech of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat
Chairperson of the African Union Commission

- Excellency Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, President of the Faso and Current Chairman of the G5 Sahel,**
- Excellency Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger and Current Chairman of ECOWAS,**
- Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,**
- Mr. President of the ECOWAS Commission,**
- Distinguished Representative of the Union Nations Secretary-General,**
- Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The situation in the Sahel-Sahara Region is for the AU and its Member States one of the greatest challenges to be taken up by our continent in its efforts to promote peace and security.

The crisis in northern Mali was, in 2012, the first concrete manifestation of the threats we feared for the entire Region, following the collapse of Libya. Today, the terrorist threat has spread to the centre of Mali, to the border with Niger and Burkina Faso, without forgetting the atrocities of the terrorist group, Boko Haram, in Central Sahel and around Lake Chad.

Today, we see an expansion of this gangrene and its progress towards the countries of the Gulf of Guinea; Let us remember the attack in Grand Bassam in 2016.

We are equally concerned with the multiplication of hotbeds of inter-communal tensions linked, in no small measure, to the consequences of climate change on the lifestyles and production of the various communities living in those areas. The recurrent clashes between transhumant pastoralists and farmer communities in the Region, due to the trend of shrinking grazing and cropland, are being exploited by terrorist groups, with the consequences that we are now seeing. Terrorism and religious extremism have broken the ancestral balance that prevailed among the peoples, whose relations have always been based on peaceful coexistence, tolerance and moderation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS, devoted to the counterterrorism, should afford us the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of our response to the phenomenon, and to jointly consider the ways and means to federate our initiatives and pool our resources .

I would like to recall that, following a Joint Report in 2011 on the impact of the Libyan crisis in the Sahelo-Sahara Region, the African Union, the United Nations, in close cooperation with ECOWAS, took a number of initiatives to combat terrorist armed groups then in Mali.

Many strategies have been determined on this basis. The establishment of the Nouakchott Process, the United Nations Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the establishment of the G5-Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) Initiative in the Lake Chad Basin, contribute to this response that we always want to be inclusive and holistic.

The ECOWAS-ECCAS Summit of July 2018 and today's Extraordinary Summit are further examples of this quest to reinforce collective action against terrorism, with the support of our partners, foremost among them the United Nations.

Also contributing to this dynamic is the "Accra Initiative" between Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

The presence of Chad and Mauritania, members of ECCAS and AMU at this summit, testifies to this constant search to strengthen the inclusive approach.

In this regard, I welcome the adoption by the G5 Sahel countries of the Strategy for Development and Security in 2016, supported by an ambitious Priority Investment Programme (Defence and Security, Governance, Infrastructure and Resilience), as well as the Regional Strategy for Stabilization (RSS) of the Lake Chad Basin for Resilience, launched in 2018.

For its part, the African Union has several mechanisms and frameworks to help our Member States take up the challenges of security and development. I would like to cite the Committee on Intelligence and Security Services (CISSA); the Djibouti and Nouakchott Processes, whose mandates are to assist Member States with intelligence-sharing and mutual capacity-building; without forgetting the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) and the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT).

I welcome the objectives of this summit, which are to redefine the Regional strategies and merge initiatives for more effective synergistic action between the Organisations and the States concerned.

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,**

As we see, initiatives and strategies have been developed, enormous efforts and sacrifices are made by our States and our populations. But, it must be recognised, that while the terrorist danger has been contained, it is far from being eradicated. Some of our States, in West and Central Africa, are experiencing this bitter reality every day. The sheer enormity of the threat demands that we revisit the effectiveness of our instruments of thinking and action.

The Commission is convinced of the need for an inclusive and holistic approach, based on greater Regional and Continental ownership of peace and security initiatives, within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

Our Defence and Security Forces must adapt their engagement strategies, their equipment priorities and their general modus operandi to the threat, taking into account the vital need to establish relations with the civilian populations. No fight against the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism can be effective without a better consideration of the well-being of the peoples. We must give local communities the means to empower themselves and be less vulnerable to recruitment into terrorism and criminal activities.

In this perspective, we should particularly stress the need of an effective State presence in the affected areas, including a local administration, harnessing of youths and women through the provision of basic social services, education, health, water, in short, good governance.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the new dynamic taking shape, greater coordination of foreign operations in the Sahel and West Africa is key. They have, undoubtedly, contributed greatly to building the capacities of Security Forces in the Region and we are grateful for the support of all our international partners such as the French Operation Barkhane, MINUSMA and others, but our security is and remains first and foremost our responsibility.

Counterterrorism measures must receive predictable and sustainable financial support, first of all by ourselves and with the effective involvement of all our partners.

At a recent Regional Conference on Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres and I jointly reiterated our call for "concerted and united action" in the fight against terrorism.

More recently, during the G7 Summit in Biarritz, President KABORE and I had made a strong call for funding of the fight against terrorism, particularly in the Sahel, through statutory assessed contributions by the United Nations.

As we prepare to participate in the United Nations General Assembly, we call upon the United Nations to assume fully and more effectively its leadership responsibility as the sole organ responsible for international security.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot conclude my remarks without reiterating my gratitude to His Excellency Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, President of the Faso, for associating the African Union with this important meeting and for the brotherly and warm welcome. I also extend my thanks to all the Heads of State and Government present, my colleagues the Chairpersons of the ECOWAS Commission and UEMOA and our bilateral and multilateral partners.

I would like to reaffirm the determination and continued readiness of the AU to intensify cooperation and collaboration with ECOWAS, in the face of the challenges of terrorism and violent extremism, and in our common efforts towards continental integration to achieve our goal of peace, security, stability and prosperity.

Thank you for your kind attention.