



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

The Situation in the Sahel

**Wednesday, 28 June 2017
10:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 4**

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture all respond to the need to adapt to our fast changing environment and pave the way for a better, more inclusive and sustainable world. It is widely acknowledged that making progress on the Sustainable Development Goals will be the most difficult in conflict-affected countries. Furthermore, violent conflict and unrest can reverse the gains made in development.

In 2016, the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 (2016)) stressed the importance of closer cooperation between ECOSOC and the PBC, and the centrality of development to sustaining peace. Furthermore, the 2016 joint meeting of ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission on “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace” underscored that sustaining peace was critical for achieving all the goals and, in turn, the realization of the entire 2030 Agenda can contribute to sustaining peace – before, during and after conflict.

Building on last year’s joint meeting on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and Sustaining Peace (24 June 2016), a joint meeting of ECOSOC and the PBC will be convened on 28 June 2017 on the situation in the Sahel region.

Background

The UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was developed and launched in 2013 to take a regional approach in supporting the Governments and people of the region in their efforts to address the root causes and impacts of the crisis in the Sahel. In particular, the Strategy identifies specific objectives and actions under three strategic goals, namely, governance, security and resilience. In order to maximize its impact, it was proposed to prioritize implementing UNISS in the most affected countries -- Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

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On 20 January 2017, the Security Council issued a Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2017/2) emphasizing the importance of the convening role of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in peacebuilding efforts, in collaboration with UNOWAS, in mobilizing deeper commitment and partnerships among the UN system, the countries of the Sahel and other international and regional

partners with the view to advancing the implementation of UNISS, and in adapting the strategy to the evolving needs of the region.

The situation in the Sahel remains fragile, despite numerous national, regional and international efforts. The need for regional and cross-border cooperation for stability and development is greater than ever. The Sahel region continues to be confronted by governance, security, humanitarian and development challenges. The fragile security situation in the Sahel can be partly attributed to the spread of violent extremism and terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram. The region suffers from a spillover from the conflicts in Mali and Libya and a worrying trend of home-grown jihadism, as witnessed in Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger, together with other countries of the Lake Chad Basin, which continue to fight Boko Haram.

The situation in the Sahel is exacerbated by several other peacebuilding challenges, which include governance, political inclusion, socio-economic hardships, inequalities, marginalization and exclusion, climate change, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking, and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. These challenges are a source of tension and potential unrest in the region. The resilience of Sahelian populations – some of the poorest in the world – remains under serious stress, as the effects of climate change and population growth is increasing pressure on the supply of natural resources. One in five families in the Sahel is vulnerable to food insecurity, and 12 million people will need urgent food assistance in 2017. Malnutrition continues to reach critical levels, particularly in Chad, where the prevalence of global acute malnutrition is as high as 30 per cent, double the emergency threshold. Across the region, almost 5 million people are struggling with the consequences of forced displacement. In Mali, increased violence is leading to new population displacements, as more than 3.5 million people are food insecure and some 852,000 are in need of nutrition assistance.

To reverse this trend of deepening fragility, national governments and external actors must tackle the complex interlinked challenges at stake by setting short-term objectives within a longer-term vision. To avoid a disproportionate focus on security, long-term and consistent efforts are required to extend State authority nation-wide and to reverse the pattern of growing marginalization of the poor as well as rural societies frustrated by a lack of access to basic social services, including water and sanitation, electricity, health, education and access to justice. Given the cross-border and multidimensional nature of the instability in the Sahel region, there is no military-only solution. Sustained efforts need to be exerted to promote sustainable and inclusive development, as well as to resolve local conflicts that are exacerbated by increased scarcity of resources.

Objectives of the Joint ECOSOC and the PBC meeting

The 2017 joint ECOSOC and the PBC meeting aims to:

- address the root causes and drivers of violent conflict that pertain to the social, economic and environmental areas, including socio-economic inequalities, climate change and the lack of economic opportunities and jobs; and
- engage UNOWAS, UN Country Teams and other stakeholders in the Sahel region, using the UNISS as a base, to:
 - enhance coherence across political, security, peacebuilding, development and humanitarian actors;
 - stress the linkages between short- and long-term efforts;
 - highlight the importance of partnerships; and
 - emphasize the need for cross-border activities and investments that could respond to the regional dimension of the development challenges to accelerate the implementation of UNISS and highlight potential solutions and recommendations in this regard.

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the meeting will be a Joint Summary by the ECOSOC President and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, highlighting the main conclusions and policy recommendations in support of the implementation of the UNISS.